

FATALGRAM

ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Date of Accident: March 13, 2006

Construction Industry

An equipment operator was moving an excavator from the staging area to the jobsite. The employee took a shortcut near a frozen lagoon and broke through the ice.

Description of Accident: An equipment operator (victim) was to move an excavator from the staging area to the jobsite, located on the other side of a lagoon. The operator decided to divert from the road and walk to the excavator along the shore of the lagoon. The excavator broke through the ice along the edge, capsizing the excavator. The excavator had tipped onto its left side and the house was submerged. There was no open water, the ice framed the equipment.

A mechanic, who was following the equipment along the roadway, attempted to rescue the operator. The mechanic broke the back window in an attempt to locate the victim and was not successful. Several attempts were made to locate the victim by rescue personnel. When the excavator was righted, the door was ajar and the victim was not in the house.

Conclusion:

It is undetermined whether the victim fell out of the house when it broke through the ice or if the victim attempted to escape. The area where the excavator broke through the ice was dredged and was approximately fifteen to twenty feet deeper than the rest of the lagoon. There was also a discharge pipe from the lagoon in this same area causing ice to be thinner than the rest of the lagoon.

It is unknown why the operator diverted from the roadway.

ACCIDENT PREVENTION RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Ensure operators are trained and able to recognize and judge hazardous situations.
- Keep all equipment on areas that are stable.
- Never judge ice thickness and water depth.
- An employer should have a written safety program which includes enforcement and discipline procedures to ensure that employees follow the employer's safety requirements. The employer should take steps to discover employee violations and document disciplinary action taken.