



SAFETY ALERT

DATE: 2023

SA: 0005

TITLE:

Hand entrapment - hand injury

INDUSTRY SECTOR:

Water utilities

TARGET AUDIENCE:

Waste networks, wastewater treatment and operational jetting contractors

ORIGINAL SAFETY ALERT ISSUED BY

Ausjet

During non-destructive digging (NDD) operations, the vacuum truck operator identified a blockage in the suction line. The operator attempted to remove the blockage by striking the suction hose line with a rubber mallet and operating the system in both 'vacuum' and 'blow' mode in a further attempt to dislodge the blockage.

To assist the operator, another worker climbed on top of the truck and removed an access panel that sits above the butterfly valve and return feed to the main tank. The worker attempted to clear the blockage using a crowbar. When unable to do so, they placed their hand inside the valve. When doing so, the valve closed and jammed the worker's left wrist/hand against the valve housing. Ambulance, Fire and Rescue and Police attended the incident to remove the worker from the truck, treat for pain and transport to hospital.

With the valve pinned the work's hand to the chamber, the worker used the nearby crowbar to try to take the pressure of their hand/wrist. When this failed, the truck operator tried to reopen the butterfly valve from the remote-control pendant. When this failed, a nearby worker used a blade to cut the airline feeding the valve, freeing the trapped worker's hand/wrist.

PREVENTATIVE ACTION

Never attempt to clear a blockage by placing your hands or feet near an operating vacuum system.

Ensure all power sources are isolated before working on equipment.

FOLLOW-UP ACTION

The truck's operators manual was revised to ensure that the correct process for clearing blockages was identified

The non-destructive digging safe working method statement (SWMS) was updated to clearly state the correct procedure for clearing blockages or when the truck is to be taken out of service

The SWMS made specific reference that the access panels on the truck must only be opened by qualified service personnel

All personnel operating an NDD truck were re-inducted in the new SWMS

A toolbox talk was delivered to communicate:

- The incident and findings
- All high-risk procedures and processes for safe operation of NDD trucks
- and the culture of ensuring that when unplanned events such occur to STOP, re-evaluate, and never place yourself in the line of fire

