

August 10, 2012

To Public Safety Officers, Firefighters and Lifeguards:

The death of a 12 year old boy on July 19, 2012 in Long Branch, NJ caused by the collapse of a sand trench highlights the dangers of summer beach activities. Digging holes and tunnels in the sand may present an immediate hazardous condition to those in the trench as well as those who respond after a collapse has occurred.

In the 2007 New England Journal of Medicine, Dr. Bradley Maron and Tammy Hass, R. N., discussed their findings from a review of fifty-two documented fatal and non-fatal cases that occurred over a ten year period from the collapse of sand holes that were created for recreational purposes. Victims ranged in age from 3 to 21 years, and 15 persons (29%) were age 10 years or younger. Holes ranged in size from 2 to 15 feet in diameter and 2 to 12 feet deep. Typical descriptions of the incidents were the unexpected collapse of the walls of the hole, submerging the victim and making it difficult to locate the victim. Thirty one persons died when the sand collapsed. Timely rescue and CPR were often responsible for the survival of 21 persons.

To prevent serious injury or death to the general public and emergency responders:

- Limit holes in sand for recreational purposes to less than knee depth for a small person (approximately 12 inches).
- Survey the beach for sand holes and fill in holes to prevent injuries to people walking, jogging or playing in the sand.
- Provide information to beachgoers on the dangers of digging holes in the sand.
- Ensure emergency responders are trained in trench rescue and have equipment to shore the walls of a trench during a rescue.

The New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development Office of Public Employees Occupational Safety and Health (OPEOSH) provides enforcement of occupational safety and health regulations for public employees throughout the State. OPEOSH also has a safety and health consultation and training program to provide requesting employers with free safety and health assistance. For more information on these programs call 1-800-397-3346 or visit our website at http://lwd.dol.state.nj.us/labor/lse/safetyhealth_index.html.