



Trench rescue mirrors training scenarios

By Andrew Berkman

A delicate six-hour multi-agency rescue in Brisbane's southern suburbs resulted in the successful retrieval of a man trapped by two tonnes of soil and gave emergency personnel an opportunity to put much-practiced skills into use.

On June 8, Australians awoke to witness a rescue taking place more than two metres below ground level at Archerfield. When Telstra contractor Mick Phillips became trapped in between a number of service pipes just before 1am, more than 30 QFRS and QAS personnel were called to assist.

Caught by his lower leg and foot, which

was buried under the collapsed wall, QFRS crews from nearby Acacia Ridge and Rocklea initially used airbags to try and free Phillips' foot.

When that failed, QFRS Technical Rescue Operators from Cannon Hill and Roma Street were responded to assist the initial crews to shore up the trench walls.

"A quick extraction wasn't possible without doing further harm to the patient," QFRS Manager, Special Operation Gary Littlewood said.

"Ambulance crews were satisfied he was in a stable condition so we turned our attention to maximising the safety of the site.

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“I was proud of the way all crews worked together in a calm manner to ensure the man’s safety.”

“As safety is the most important aspect of the rescue for both victim and crews it was important to secure the site and remove weight from the surrounding area.”

A bobcat was used to remove loose dirt from around the top of the trench and a front-end loader was called in to build a secondary trench at right angles to the rescue site. This enabled crews to work slowly towards the victim without having the weight of the material trapping his leg cause more discomfort by movement.

The original trench, between a road and fence didn’t allow crews to follow the standard procedure of digging a parallel trench to create a less volatile “excavation site”.

Meanwhile ambulance crews undertook the task of administering pain relief and stabilising Phillips who was in danger of going into shock.

Just after dawn approached, spotters

deployed on the edge of the trench alerted the Incident Controller to cracks appearing in the clay – five hours into the rescue.

Threat of an imminent secondary collapse required quick action from the crews to provide further shoring to the walls of the trench to create a protective cell around the patient and rescue crews.

Crews abandoned the use of heavy machinery due to vibration of the area and resorted to using hand tools in the wet clay subsoil.

“Our personnel are trained to undertake this type of rescue,” AD Tom James said.

“However it’s very rare that we come across a person trapped in a trench.

“I was proud of the way all crews from both QFRS and QAS worked together in a calm manner to ensure the man’s safety.”

Staff from the contract team also played an important part with constructive information about the area.

Tom said water seeping into the trench made it more difficult for crews to see where and how to remove the clay from around Phillips’ foot and pipes to enable the release of his foot.

After almost six hours, Phillips was freed and transported to Brisbane PA hospital.

