

CONTRACTOR FINED \$135G FOR COLLAPSE

2020 work accident killed two men

BY MATTHEW CHAYES
matthew.chayes@newsday.com

The federal workplace-safety regulator has fined a Roslyn contractor \$135,612 for last year's deadly trench collapse in Upper Brookville that killed two workers, who were buried under mud and sand during the installation of a septic tank.

Deniz Dos Santos Almeida, 57, and Max Antonio Turcios, 46, were stuck in a five-to-seven-foot wall of the mud and sand after the 30-foot trench collapsed. The men were working for the contractor, RC Structures Inc. of Roslyn.

The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration announced on Wednesday that the contractor had

agreed both to pay the fine and cease digging excavations. The regulator also criticized the contractor for failing to protect the workers and ignoring a warning from an employee on site that the trench posed a cave-in hazard.

"A trench can collapse suddenly and with great force, crushing and burying workers in an instant. Amid such dangerous conditions, employers must follow all excavation safety requirements and remove employees to prevent tragedies like this," the regulator's Long Island area director, Kevin Sullivan, said in a news release.

The collapse happened just before 5 p.m. on Jan. 28, 2020, at the site on Wolver Hollow Road, where septic rings were



Old Brookville Police at the scene of the trench collapse on Wolver Hollow Road on Jan. 28, 2020.

JIM STAUBITZER

being installed.

The company "did not provide a protective system to prevent a trench collapse, and did not remove the employees from the trench after a competent person employed by the company had identified a cave-in hazard. OSHA also found the trench lacked an adequate ladder or other safe means of exit and that the company allowed stacked concrete and excavated materials to be stored at the trench's edge."

RC Structures also failed to safeguard its workers with head protection, the regulator said, "exposing them to struck-by hazards."

The company agreed to develop a safety checklist, place a competent person on site to make sure it's followed, hire a consultant to conduct at least one on-site assessment and enact companywide training on ladder safety and hard-hat use, the regulator said.

A message left with the company wasn't returned.

Upper Brookville Mayor Elliot Conway in January 2020 said the village was reviewing building permits to make sure "everything was appropriately done." Reached on Friday at home, Conway referred inquiries to village hall. A recording said village hall was closed

Friday.

RC Structures' website says the company, which does superstructure, foundation and concrete work, was established in 2006 and has constructed dozens of mid- to high-rise building projects "on time and on budget"

An obituary posted on a funeral home website said that Almeida, of Kenilworth, New Jersey, was a longtime foreman for the company who was born in Portugal and immigrated at age 23. A short obituary for Turcio said he was to be buried in Honduras.

The men's families could not be reached for comment Friday.

U.S., Iran agree to resume nuclear talks

The Associated Press

The United States and Iran said Friday that they would begin negotiations through intermediaries next week to try to get both countries back into an accord limiting Iran's nuclear program, nearly three years after former President Donald Trump pulled the United States out of the deal.

The announcement marked the first major progress in efforts to return both countries to the 2015 accord, which bound Iran to restrictions on its nuclear programs in return for relief from U.S. and international sanctions. President Joe Biden came into office saying getting back into the accord was a priority. But Iran and the United States have disagreed over Iran's demands that sanctions be lifted first, and the



Heavy water nuclear reactor facility in Arak, Iran, on Dec. 23, 2019.

stalemate threatened to become an early foreign policy setback for the Biden administration.

State Department spokesperson Ned Price called the resump-

tion of negotiations, scheduled for Tuesday in Vienna, "a healthy step forward." But Price added, "These remain early days, and we don't anticipate an

immediate breakthrough as there will be difficult discussions ahead."

Agreement on the start of indirect talks came after the European Union helped broker a virtual meeting of officials from Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and Iran, which have remained in the accord, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Price said next week's talks will be structured around working groups that the European Union was forming with the remaining participants in the accord, including Iran.

"The primary issues that will be discussed are the nuclear steps that Iran would need to take in order to return to compliance with the terms of the JCPOA, and the sanctions relief steps that the United States

would need to take in order to return to compliance as well," Price said.

The United States, like Iran, said it did not anticipate direct talks now. Price said the United States remains open to that idea, however.

In a tweet, Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif said the aim of the Vienna session would be to "rapidly finalize sanction-lifting & nuclear measures for choreographed removal of all sanctions, followed by Iran ceasing remedial measures."

The ultimate goal of the deal is to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear bomb, something it insists it doesn't want to do. Iran now has enough enriched uranium to make a bomb, but nowhere near the amount it had before the nuclear deal was signed.