



## “What Happened?”

This occurred at two different parking lot sites last year. In both instances, a soil report was issued prior to bid and both reports showed that soft native soils would be encountered at the sites. Even so, once it occurred, the big questions were, “How do we fix this, and who is going to pay for it?” In both cases, the disturbed soils were excavated and replaced with up to 5 feet of clean sand fill. We’re not sure who paid the costs, but all parties involved, including the owner, wanted some answers as to “What Happened?”

How Does This Happen? This situation occurs most often when very wet and sensitive clay and silt soils are combined with the “rocking action” of an excavator swinging loaded buckets of soil from side to side. However, it also requires a little help by the operator to not stop

swinging his bucket back and forth until the muck is coming in the door of the cab.

How Can It Be Prevented? Here are some suggestions.

Contractors: A good preventive measure is to ask the soil engineer what to expect relative to working on the site with heavy equipment. Hopefully, the soil report already emphasized the presence of wet and sensitive soils at the site, but a call to the soil engineer might provide contractors with a better picture of how the soils will react to heavy equipment. Also, if the soil report recommends that a geotextile fabric or geogrid be placed in the parking or driveway areas, there is an increased chance that there are soft and sensitive soils at the site.

*"Caution: Potentially soft and sensitive soils. Do not disturb. See soil report."*



Design Engineers: It's not the responsibility of the design engineers to call the bidders and caution them on the potentially soft and sensitive soils at the site. That's what the soil report is for. However, one small thing that might be a big help is to place at least one note on the construction drawings that says something like, *"Caution: Potentially soft and sensitive soils. Do not disturb. See soil report."* In today's fast pace world, it seems we all need big "road signs" like this to warn us of what we are about to encounter.

Whatever the case, nobody likes this to occur, especially the owners. Efforts to prevent this will be to everyone's benefit.

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