

Plumber to recover after Oakland sewer line rescue

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POSTED: 01/13/2016 06:39:06 AM PST

OAKLAND -- A 13-hour overnight rescue effort in East Oakland ended successfully Wednesday morning when a plumber was safely freed from a collapsed pit of sand and soil in a sewer line 15 feet underground.

The drama riveted the city starting Tuesday afternoon and ended when fire crews pulled the man to safety at 2:04 a.m. Wednesday, just over 13 hours after the ground gave way and trapped the worker.

The man went to nearby Highland Hospital, and fire officials said his injuries were not life threatening. "It was a long and complicated rescue," Battalion Chief Dino Torres of the Oakland Fire Department said. "The ground was unstable, but we had great coordination with the Alameda County Public Works Department, doctors at Highland Hospital and the company itself."



Oakland firefighters and other emergency responders work to rescue a plumber trapper in an underground sewage line in east Oakland, Tuesday, Jan. 12, 2016. (Ross Cameron)

The worker was part of a four-man crew working in the 2300 block of 21st Avenue when the ground caved in about 12:50 p.m. Tuesday. The crew came from Star Rooter and Plumbing Inc. in Hayward. Torres said.

The worker sunk about 15 feet below the street when the mixture of soil and sand gave way, Torres said. "There was a lot of backfill from work that had been done earlier," Torres said. "It was a lot of sand. We'd move some, store it up, then dig up around him. When we'd dig, more sand would come in." The worker remained conscious throughout the rescue, Torres said.

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Rescue crews monitored his vital signs and provided oxygen during the rescue efforts and were in touch with doctors at Highland Hospital who advised rescuers as the operation proceeded.

"They let us know if there was anything we needed to administer," he said. "It took a lot of work by a lot of people."