

TOOLBOX TALK

JOBSITE HAZARDS



Trenching & Excavation

Trenching and excavation are among the most hazardous construction operations. OSHA defines a trench as a narrow underground excavation that is deeper than it is wide, and is no wider than 15 feet. An excavation is any man-made cut, cavity, trench, or depression in the earth's surface formed by earth removal. The greatest risk of open trenches/excavation are cave-ins and are much more likely than other excavation related accidents to result in worker fatalities. Other potential hazards include falls, falling loads, hazardous atmospheres, and incidents involving mobile equipment. Trench collapses cause dozens of fatalities and hundreds of injuries each year.

Protect Yourself

OSHA requires safe access and egress to all excavations, including ladders, steps, ramps, or other safe means of exit for employees working in trench excavations 4 feet or deeper. These devices must be located within 25 feet of all workers.

Do not enter an unprotected trench! Trenches 5 feet deep or greater require a protective system unless the excavation is made entirely in stable rock. Trenches 20 feet deep or greater require that the protective system be designed by a registered professional engineer. When designing a protective system you must consider many factors: soil classification, depth of cut, water content of soil, weather or climate changes, surcharge loads (spoils and trench materials) and other operations in the vicinity. Some of the types of protective systems include:

- Sloping - cutting back the trench wall at an angle inclined away from the excavation
- Shoring - installing supports to prevent soil movement
- Shielding - installing trench boxes or supports to prevent cave-ins

Have a Competent Person

OSHA standards require that trenches be inspected daily and as conditions change by a competent person prior to worker entry to ensure elimination of excavation hazards. A competent person is an individual who is capable of identifying existing and predictable hazards or working conditions that are hazardous, unsanitary, or dangerous to employees and who is authorized to take prompt corrective measures to eliminate or control these hazards and conditions.

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Take Home Point:

Unprotected trenches and excavations can be dangerous, if not fatal. Before entering an open trench/excavation make sure the competent person has inspected and eliminated any hazards. Be sure to have egress routes and the proper protective system in place to prevent cave-ins. If you feel unsafe, do not enter!

Date: _____

Safety Leader: _____

Crew Members:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

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