

TOOLBOX TALK #24

SAFE TRENCHING AND EXCAVATIONS – PART 2

Keeping workers safe during trenching and excavation can be a challenge. The work poses numerous risks, particularly collapses. Trench-related deaths have prompted OSHA emphasis programs at the federal level.



Never underestimate the importance of planning ahead for trench work. No matter how many trenching, shoring and backfilling jobs an employer has done in the past, it's important to approach each new job with care and preparation. Factors to consider are:

- Proximity and physical condition of nearby structures
- Overhead and underground utility lines
- Soil type and classification
- Quantity of shoring or protective systems that may be required
- Fall protection needs

Additionally, OSHA requires a safe way to enter/exit within 25 feet of the work (in 4 feet deep and deeper excavations).

Under OSHA's specific requirements on excavations, it is required to wear hi-vis when working around traffic or heavy equipment. In addition to struck-by hazards, traffic may also contribute to vibration, thus weakening soil and hazardous atmospheres due to exhaust.

Some crews are so familiar with working in excavations and trenches that they get complacent. Don't let this happen to you. Every job is different, Every excavation is different. Workers need to be vocal and callout unsafe work practices. Speak up! We all need to be looking out for each other. That's the easiest thing to do but also the hardest thing to do. Workers don't want to come off as afraid, especially working with their peers on the same level. It's a lot easier to say something now than at the funeral.