

# Excavations Are Serious

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

In Seattle, a man was buried to his waist when the eight-foot deep trench he was working in collapsed around him. It took 50 firefighters and medics to dig him out. He was lucky.

In San Diego, the walls of a trench collapsed around two workers. Both of them were killed.

In Houston, a 4-6 foot deep trench failed around two workers. One worker died and the second was treated for a broken hip. These people were not lucky.

Excavations and trenches need not be deep or large to create a life-threatening hazard. Soil is heavy, and failures take place with little or no notice. You can be trapped before there is time to react. So it is important that every excavation be prepared correctly, allowing you to complete your job safely and efficiently. Remember that every trench is different. Soil type, moisture content, depth, configuration, proximity to existing structures, and location of spoil piles all work together to make every excavation unique.

### **Keep these points in mind when working in Excavations:**

Follow the recommendations of your "Competent Person" carefully. Their job is to ensure that the excavation is adequately protected so you can complete your task safely.

All trenches and excavations over 5 feet in depth must be protected from cave-ins unless they are made entirely of stable rock. Protection can be provided by adequately sloping back the sides of the cut or by benching the excavation. Installing shoring or using trench boxes also reinforces trenches. If shoring or boxes are used be sure the top of the box extends at least 18 inches above the hole. And remember, if the hole is deeper than 6 feet, fall protection should be installed around the perimeter to protect those working on the surface.

Spoil piles must stay at least 2 feet back from the edge of the hole. This is measured from the point where the slough of the pile ends. Placing the spoil any closer exerts excessive pressure on the walls of the excavation and thus increases the chance of a wall failure.

Install ladders, so that no matter which way you travel in the trench a ladder can be accessed within at least 25 feet.

You are the one that is going into the hole. So check the methods being used to protect the excavation, including the shoring equipment's condition and the ladder out of the hole. Prior to climbing down the ladder, check the spoil pile location and equipment that is near the excavation. Do you feel comfortable with the excavation, its protection, and the nearby surroundings?

Don't take chances, if you see something that needs attention; speak to your supervisor before going down in the hole to start your job. Excavations are serious business. Let's keep them a safe place to work.

## **GENERAL SAFETY REVIEW**

This is a time to review all safety concerns, not just today's topic. Keep your notes on this page before, during and after the safety meeting.

Are you aware of any safety hazards from any other crews? Point out any hazards other crews are creating that this crew should know about. Tell the crew what you intend to do about those hazards.

Do we have any other safety business? Discuss any past issues or problems. Report any progress of investigations and action taken.

Have there been any accidents, near misses or complaints? Discuss any accidents, near misses, and complaints that have happened since the last safety meeting. Also recognize the safety contributions made by members of the crew.

Please remember, we want to hear from you about any health and safety issues that come up. If we don't know about problems, we can't take action to fix them.

## **ENDING THE MEETING**

Circulate Sign-Off Form.

Assign one or more crew member(s) to help with next safety meeting.

Refer action items for follow-up.

Do you have any Safety Recommendations?

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Do you have any Job Specific Topics you would like us to discuss?

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Comments:

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