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Subchapter 4. Construction Safety Orders

Article 6. Excavations

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§1540. Excavations.

(a) Scope and application. This article applies to all open excavations made in the earth's surface. Excavations are defined to include trenches.

(b) Definitions applicable to this article.

Accepted engineering practices means those requirements which are compatible with standards of practice required by a registered professional engineer.

Aluminum hydraulic shoring. A pre-engineered shoring system comprised of aluminum hydraulic cylinders (crossbraces) used in conjunction with vertical rails (uprights) or horizontal rails (walers). Such system is designed specifically to support the sidewalls of an excavation and prevent cave-ins.

Bell-bottom pier hole. A type of shaft or footing excavation, the bottom of which is made larger than the cross section above to form a belled shape.

Benching (Benching system). A method of protecting employees from cave-ins by excavating the sides of an excavation to form one or a series of horizontal levels or steps, usually with vertical or near-vertical surfaces between levels.

Cave-in. The separation of a mass of soil or rock material from the side of an excavation, or the loss of soil from under a trench shield or support system, and its sudden movement into the excavation, either by falling or sliding, in sufficient quantity so that it could entrap, bury, or otherwise injure and immobilize a person.

Crossbraces. The horizontal members of a shoring system installed perpendicular to the sides of the excavation, the ends of which bear against either uprights or wales.

Excavation. Any man-made cut, cavity, trench, or depression in an earth surface, formed by earth removal.

Faces or sides. The vertical or inclined earth surfaces formed as a result of excavation work.

Failure. The breakage, displacement, or permanent deformation of a structural member or connection so as to reduce its structural integrity and its supportive capabilities.

Hazardous atmosphere. An atmosphere which by reason of being explosive, flammable, poisonous, corrosive, oxidizing, irritating, oxygen deficient, toxic, or otherwise harmful, may cause death, illness, or injury.

Kickout. The accidental release or failure of a cross brace.

Protective system. A method of protecting employees from cave-ins, from material that could fall or roll from an excavation face or into an excavation, or from the collapse of adjacent structures. Protective systems include support systems, sloping and benching systems, shield systems, and other systems that provide the necessary protection.

Ramp. An inclined walking or working surface that is used to gain access to one point from another, and is constructed from earth or from structural materials such as steel or wood.

Registered professional engineer. A person who is registered as a professional engineer in the state where the work is to be performed. However, a professional engineer, registered in any state is deemed to be a “registered professional engineer” within the meaning of this standard when approving designs for “manufactured protective systems” or “tabulated data” to be used in interstate commerce.

Sheeting. The members of a shoring system that retain the earth in position and in turn are supported by other members of the shoring system.

Shield (Shield system). A structure that is able to withstand the forces imposed on it by a cave-in and thereby protect employees within the structure. Shields can be permanent structures or can be designed to be portable and moved along as work progresses. Additionally, shields can be either premanufactured or job-built in accordance with Section 1541.1(c)(3) or (c)(4). Shields used in trenches are usually referred to as “trench boxes” or “trench shields.”

Shoring (Shoring system). A structure such as a metal hydraulic, mechanical or timber shoring system that supports the sides of an excavation and which is designed to prevent cave-ins.

Sides. See “Faces.”

Sloping (Sloping system). A method of protecting employees from cave-ins by excavating to form sides of an excavation that are inclined away from the excavation so as to prevent cave-ins. The angle of incline required to prevent a cave-in varies with differences in such factors as the soil type, environmental conditions of exposure, and application of surcharge loads.

Stable rock. Natural solid mineral material that can be excavated with vertical sides and will remain intact while exposed. Unstable rock is considered to be stable when the rock material on the side or sides of the excavation is secured against caving-in or movement by rock bolts or by another protective system that has been designed by a registered professional engineer.

Structural ramp. A ramp built of steel or wood, usually used for vehicle access. Ramps made of soil or rock are not considered structural ramps.

Support system. A structure such as underpinning, bracing, or shoring, which provides support to an adjacent structure, underground installation, or the sides of an excavation.

Tabulated data. Tables and charts approved by a registered professional engineer and used to design and construct a protective system.

Trench (Trench excavation). A narrow excavation (in relation to its length) made below the surface of the

ground. In general, the depth is greater than the width, but the width of a trench (measured at the bottom) is not greater than 15 feet. If forms or other structures are installed or constructed in an excavation so as to reduce the dimension measured from the forms or structure to the side of the excavation to 15 feet or less, (measured at the bottom of the excavation), the excavation is also considered to be a trench.

Trench box. See “Shield.”

Trench shield. See “Shield.”

Uprights. The vertical members of a trench shoring system placed in contact with the earth and usually positioned so that individual members do not contact each other. Uprights placed so that individual members are closely spaced, in contact with or interconnected to each other, are often called “sheeting.”

Wales. Horizontal members of a shoring system placed parallel to the excavation face whose sides bear against the vertical members of the shoring system or earth.

Note: Authority cited: Section 142.3, Labor Code. Reference: Section 142.3, Labor Code.

HISTORY

1. Repealer and new section filed 8-23-82; effective thirtieth day thereafter (Register 82, No. 35). For prior history, see Register 75, No. 21.
2. Amendment of subsection (b)(3) filed 11-18-83; effective thirtieth day thereafter (Register 83, No. 47).
3. Amendment of subsections (b)(2) and (b)(3) filed 5-1-87; operative 5-31-87 (Register 87, No. 19).
4. Repealer and new section filed 8-26-91; operative 9-25-91 (Register 92, No. 13).
5. Editorial correction of subsection (b) - “Cave-in” (Register 2016, No. 35).

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