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Working Safely in Trenches

When done safely, trenching operations can reduce worker exposure to cave-ins, falling loads, hazardous atmospheres, and hazards from mobile equipment.

OSHA standards require that trenches and protective systems be inspected daily and as conditions change by a competent person before work begins.



Never enter a trench unless:

- It has been properly inspected by a competent person.
- Cave-in protection measures are in place.
- There is a safe way to enter and exit.
- Equipment and materials are away from the edge.
- It is free of standing water and atmospheric hazards.

Prevent trench collapses:

- Trenches 5 feet deep or greater require a protective system.
- Trenches 20 feet deep or greater require a protective system designed by a registered professional engineer.

Protective systems for trenches:

- SLOPE or bench trench walls by cutting back the trench wall at an angle inclined away from the excavation.
- SHORE trench walls by installing aluminum hydraulic or other types of supports to prevent soil movement.
- SHIELD trench walls by using trench boxes or other types of supports to prevent soil cave-ins.

For more information:



U.S. Department of Labor

OSHA[®] Occupational Safety and Health Administration

www.osha.gov (800) 321-OSHA (6742)