



Tailgate Safety Talk

Information You Can Use to Prevent Accidents & Injuries

Excavations Are Serious Business

Imagine yourself in the place of a worker 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 another incident, the walls of a trench collapsed around two workers. Both of them were killed. Then, there was the case of a 4-6 foot deep trench which 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:

- 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.
- Trenches are also reinforced by installing shoring or using trench boxes. 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.

Users of this tailgate talk are advised to determine the suitability of the information as it applies to local situations and work practices and its conformance with applicable laws and regulations.