TOOLBOX TALK

Excavation and Trench Safety

Topic	Excavation and Trench Safety	Attendees	0

WHAT WE TALKED ABOUT

A trench can collapse with no warning, and a cubic yard of soil can weigh 3,000 pounds, about as much as a small car. People caught in a collapse are often crushed or suffocated before anyone can dig them out. Never get into a trench that is not properly protected.

1. Trenches 5 feet or deeper need a protective system: sloping, shoring or a trench box, or shallower if the competent person sees signs of a possible cave-in. Over 20 feet must be designed by a registered professional engineer.
2. Shallow trenches kill too. A worker kneeling or bent over in a waist deep trench can be buried by one slab of the wall.
3. A competent person inspects the trench daily before work and after rain or any change.
4. Shoring and trench boxes only work if they are installed the way they were designed or tabulated. No missing struts, no damaged boxes, and no digging below the bottom of the box beyond its rating.
5. Keep spoil, materials and equipment at least 2 feet back from the edge, more in loose ground.
6. Check for underground services before digging. Never assume the plans are exact.
7. Trenches 4 feet or deeper need a ladder or ramp within 25 feet of every worker.
8. Never ride the bucket or climb the shoring to get in or out.
9. Put barriers around the excavation so people and vehicles cannot fall in.
10. Rain, water, vibration and nearby traffic weaken the walls. Watch for cracks, bulging and falling soil.
11. Keep water out of the trench. Pump it out and do not work in a trench with water building up unless it has extra protection.
12. Test the air in trenches over 4 feet deep wherever a hazardous atmosphere could exist, such as near landfills, gas lines or sewers.
13. If the trench starts to collapse, get out and stay out. Rescue only with proper support in place.

QUESTIONS FOR THE CREW

1. How deep is our excavation today, and what support is in place?
2. Who inspected it this morning?
3. Where is the ladder or way out?
4. What signs would tell you the walls are moving?
5. What would we do if someone was buried, and who would we call?

Reference: 29 CFR 1926 Subpart P (Excavations)

RUN BY

	Name	Signature	Date	
Presenter				

ATTENDANCE

Name	Role / company	Signature	Date

Name	Role / company	Signature	Date

Keep this record for at least 1 year (WA requires 1 year; CA requires meetings at least every 10 working days).