

Toolbox Talk # 6.01 – Site Excavation

All the while your company competent person and site supervisor are planning an excavation, you can just sit back under some shade tree and wait, right? Wrong! Participating in a planned dig, by being a part of the process, can prevent accidents and possibly save your life.

It is a good idea for contractors to develop safety checklists to make certain there is adequate information about the jobsite, and all needed items are on hand. It is also a good idea for you to know and understand the key issues on a trench safety checklist.

Some of those issues are:

- traffic
- nearness of structures and their conditions
- soil
- surface and ground water
- the water table
- overhead and underground utilities
- weather

Checklists should also incorporate elements of relevant OSHA standards as well as other information necessary for safe operations. In fact, it is your employers responsibility to instruct you in the recognition and avoidance of unsafe conditions and the regulations applicable to your work environment.

Your company competent person is responsible for inspecting all excavations, adjacent areas, and protective systems each day for evidence of a situation that could result in:

- possible cave-ins,
- indications of failure of protective systems,
- hazardous atmospheres, and
- other hazardous conditions.

Competent persons are also required to perform these inspections as needed and after every rainstorm or other hazard-increasing occurrence such as blasting.

The thing is, chances are your competent person is not going to be at your excavation the entire work shift. Who does that leave to ensure the jobsite remains safe? If anything goes wrong, you must have the ability to act instantly. That takes training, practice, and most of all alertness.

Some other things you should recognize as threats before you even get into a trench are:

- When exposed to public vehicular traffic you must wear warning vests or other suitable garments marked with or made of reflectorized or high-visibility material.
- Remove or neutralize all surface encumbrances (spoil piles, equipment, etc.) that may create a falling object hazard.
- In addition, no employee should operate a piece of equipment without first being properly trained to handle it, and fully alerted to its potential hazards.

You should also look around for:

- tension cracks in walls of, slopes of, or ground near the excavation.
- ground settlement or sinking.
- changes in wall slope or bulging.
- increase in strut loads.
- spalling (breaking off in slabs), or sloughing (crumbling or falling away) of soils.
- excessive seepage and piping of fine soils.
- softening of sidewalls.
- boiling of trench bottom.
- creaking or popping sounds.
- visual deformation of bracing system or trench.

Any of these signs indicates you should not enter a trench, or immediately leave a trench, and report the problem to your supervisor or competent person.

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Project: _____

Date: _____

Supervisor: _____

Company: _____

Other safety issues covered or comments from crew members:

Attendees:

Name: (please print)	Signature:	Company:
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