

Trenching and Excavation Safety

On May 31, 2019, HIOSH adopted the Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) National Emphasis Program (NEP) on Trenching and Excavation. Inspections based on this NEP will start on September 1, 2019. Stay tuned for our next volume that will include more information on trenching and excavation safety.

Trenching and excavation work exposes workers to extremely dangerous hazards. Trench collapses, or cave-ins, pose the greatest risk to workers' lives. When done safely, trenching operations can reduce worker exposure to other potential hazards including falls, falling loads, hazardous atmospheres, and incidents involving mobile equipment. OSHA standards require that employers provide workplaces free of recognized hazards. The employer must comply with the trenching and excavation requirements of 29 CFR 1926.651 and 1926.652.

Did you know?

The fatality rate for trenching work spiked Approx. 300% between 2014-2016.

Additional information:

www.osha.gov/trenching



TRENCHING REQUIRES A COMPETENT PERSON

A competent person is an individual, designated by the employer, who can identify existing and predictable hazards in the surroundings or working conditions. Under the Excavation standards, tasks performed by the competent person include:

- Classifying soil
- Designing structural ramps
- Conducting site inspections
- Inspecting protective systems
- Monitoring water removal equipment

Protective systems for trenches:

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

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.

Trench Fatalities			
Years	2014	2015	2016
Trench Fatalities in all	13	25	36
Trench Fatalities in Construction	10	18	33

Source: BLS

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 at least 2 feet away from the edge.
- It is free of standing water and atmospheric hazards.

If you would like to read the full HIOSH directive, find it here:
www.labor.hawaii.gov/hiosh/guidelines/directives/

For more information, please contact HIOSH at:
dlir.hiosh@hawaii.gov or 808-586-9100