

OSHA Training Toolbox Talk: Basic Excavation Safety – Safety Tips When Using Timber Shoring

[Reference 1926 Subpart P]

Timber shoring is not utilized as a protective system in trenches as much as it used to be, thanks to the introduction of easier-to-use devices such as hydraulic aluminum shoring and trench boxes. However, it still proves valuable in some instances, such as when there are a lot of pipes or other utility lines crossing through a trench. But be aware that timber shoring may only be used when installed under the direction of a Competent Person using an approved method, such as the OSHA timber shoring charts or a registered professional engineer's design drawing and instructions. In addition, here are a few safety tips to keep in mind when timber shoring is used:

- Never enter any trench with timber shoring installed until you are certain the Competent Person has cleared it for entry;
- Never walk out from the protected area of a trench into an unprotected area for any reason, even if it is just for a few seconds. A cave-in can happen in a split second with little or no warning of what is about to occur;
- Always use a portable ladder or other approved means to enter and exit the shored area of the trench. Do not climb up and down the wood cross braces or screw-jack pipe braces used to support the timber shores. When using a portable ladder to enter or exit the trench, make certain it is located inside of the protected area of the trench. In addition, secure the ladder against unintentional displacement, and make sure the side rails of the ladder extend at least three feet above the top of the ground or other landing surface so you have something to grab when getting on and off of the ladder;
- Be on the lookout for any damage or deterioration that may occur to the timber shoring members. Broken wood members, loose fitting timbers, and bent pipe screw jacks are but a few of the things that need to be reported as quickly as possible so they can be evaluated by the Competent Person and repaired or replaced when necessary;
- Also report other conditions that may affect the safe function of timber shoring. For example, the uprights on a timber shoring system are designed to fit firmly against the sides of the trench. But if the timber or pipe screw jack cross-braces are accidentally knocked out of place or otherwise become loose, the uprights could start to slide down the sides of the trench, and possibly even fall. So report any signs of loose shoring components to the Competent Person or your supervisor ASAP;
- Federal OSHA standards do allow excavation of soil up to two feet below the bottom of the timber shores, but only in certain conditions. So do not excavate soil to a level below the bottom of the wooden shores without first confirming with the Competent Person it is safe to do so; and if so, confirm how deep you can dig.

These are just a few tips for working safely in and around a timber shoring system. Can anyone think of any other tips that are pertinent to timber shoring safety? Please take a moment and your print your name and provide your signature on our OSHA Safety Training Certification form so you will get credit for attending today's toolbox talk.