

OSHA Training Toolbox Talk: Watch Out for Falling Objects When Working Inside Excavations

[Reference 1926 Subpart P]

Cave-ins are the primary concern of most people when working inside of an excavation. But you are also pretty vulnerable to being struck by a falling object when working inside an excavation, and the results can be devastating! So today we will discuss a few simple but effective steps we should take each and every time we are working inside of an excavation to help prevent injuries caused by something rolling or falling into the excavation and striking a worker below:

- Always place spoil, which is the soil and rock we are digging out of the excavation, a minimum of two feet back from the edge of the excavation (*see handout*). This helps prevent soil, dirt clods, and rocks from rolling off the pile and over the edge of the excavation and striking someone below. In fact, you may even want to move the spoil pile even farther than 2 feet back, where possible, as soil has a tendency to settle and creep closer to the edge over time. The same two foot rule also applies to other items, such as pipes, fittings, and tools placed along the edge of an excavation. Keeping them back from the edges and, when necessary, blocking them so they cannot roll into the excavation is critical.
- Use a rock bar or similar tool to knock partially embedded rocks off the vertical faces of excavations whenever you see them sticking out of the sides. The same goes for those chunks of soil that “scale” as they dry up and start to peel away from the sides of the excavation over time. In situations where a lot of scale has developed on the sides of an excavation, get the backhoe operator to use the bucket to lightly scrape the sides to knock off the scale.
- Never position yourself underneath any load being handled by lifting or digging equipment. If you must help guide the load as it is being raised out of or lowered down into the excavation, use a tag line so you can keep a safe distance away from the load in case it is suddenly lowered or dropped.
- When mobile equipment is operated adjacent to an excavation, or when the equipment is required to approach the edge of an excavation, and the operator does not have a clear and direct view of the edge of the excavation, utilize some sort of warning system so the equipment does not get too close to the edge and roll into the excavation or break off soil along the edge. Methods to consider include installing barricades adjacent to the edge that the equipment operator can easily see, using a spotter to signal the equipment operator as they are approaching the edge, or installing stop logs along the edge at a safe distance so the wheels of the equipment roll up against them, signaling the equipment operator to stop. And when possible, the grade should be sloped away from the excavation.
- And just in case . . . always wear your hardhat when working inside of an excavation!

Does anyone have any questions about the steps we just discussed for preventing materials and objects falling into an excavation? Thank you for your participation today. And please be sure you sign your name to the training certification form so you get credit for attending this training session.

HEADS UP!

Take Steps to Avoid Being Struck By Falling Objects

