

OSHA Training Toolbox Talk: Avoiding Ground Level Hazards Lurking at Excavation Sites

[Reference 1926 Subpart P]

Most people are mindful that work taking place inside an excavation can be extremely dangerous. Cave-ins, striking an underground utility line, or being exposed to a hazardous atmosphere are just a few of the potential hazards that could injure someone working within an excavation. However, there are many hazards located on or above the surface of the earth at excavation sites that could harm workers as well. So today we will discuss some of the dangers associated with trenching and excavation work that are present on or above the ground, and how we can avoid them.

- **Always look above where you will be digging to see if there are any electrical lines hanging overhead.** Because our focus is usually directed downward while we dig, it is easy to accidentally raise a backhoe bucket or long section of pipe into an energized electrical line. If any overhead electric lines are present it may be necessary to have them de-energized or insulated to prevent electrocution, so check with the Competent Person or your Supervisor.
- **Identify any encumbrances present on the surface that could present a potential safety hazard once excavation begins.** A large boulder located next to an excavation could roll and fall into the excavation if the soil collapses from beneath. And trees, utility poles, and communication equipment poles located adjacent to the edge of an excavation could also fall over and strike someone standing nearby as the soil near them is being excavated. So always check with the excavation site's competent person to see if it is necessary to first relocate any surface encumbrances or secure them in place with bracing before digging begins.
- **Always make sure you and your co-workers are easily seen by equipment operators and vehicle drivers in the area.** Always wear your high visibility vest or similar garments. And follow company / organizational policy regarding use of traffic control devices and flaggers where required to avoid being struck by a vehicle when working near roadways.
- **Keep your distance from excavation equipment** equipped with buckets, such as front-end loaders, backhoes and excavators, as the bucket can strike you as it is raised, lowered, or makes a sudden swing. Never assume the equipment operator sees you standing nearby. And also avoid standing or walking directly behind any vehicle or piece of earth-moving equipment because the operator's vision may be blocked when backing up.
- **Avoid standing next to any trailers, dump beds, or roll-off containers as they are being loaded or unloaded** to avoid being struck by hazards such as soil spillage or other falling materials, rolling pipes, or wheeled excavation equipment.
- **Never stand or walk on any sidewalk, slab, or foundation where the soil beneath has been excavated** unless your supervisor or competent person has given you the okay to do so. In some cases, underpinning or shores may have to be installed to support these structures so they do not collapse when someone stands on top of them.

While these are not the only above-ground hazards to avoid on trenching and excavation sites, they do represent some common causes of worker injuries and deaths. So keep these tips in mind.

Does anyone have any additional tips to share for avoiding these or other above-ground hazards at our excavation sites? Thank you for your participation, and please be sure to sign your name to the training certification form so you get credit for attending today's training session.