SE TX Excavation Hazard Alert (Nov 2022)

Last fiscal year, 2022, there were two non-fatal excavation related cave-ins in the Houston area. In July 2022, OSHA put out a press release indicating that trenching and excavation related fatalities had significantly increased Nationally compared to the year before. We are one month into the new fiscal 2023 year and we've had two trench cave-ins which resulted in fatalities. Every trench has the potential to be deadly. Following the basics of trench safety can prevent further deaths and injuries.

FY 23 Fatal Trench Cave-In Incidents

- Employees were working in a trench as part of a utility project to tie in water lines to an upcoming community being constructed. The trench collapsed on one side causing an employee to be pinned. The employee was transported to the hospital by private vehicle where he was admitted for treatment. The employee was taken for surgery and passed away in the surgical ICU.
- Employee was working in an excavation on a compactor when the excavation collapsed pinning him against the machine.

FY 2022 Non-Fatal Trench Cave-In Incidents

- Employee had been leveling dirt to make pipe grade and was going toward the other end of the trench box to exit the trench using the ladder. He went into the trench box and the benched soil above the box caved in on him. He suffered a lumbar spine compression fracture.
- An employee was working in a trench attempting to repair a leaking pipe and during the repair process the trench wall collapsed onto him. HFD rescued him. He received a broken clavicle, broken ribs, and a bruised arm.

5 Things You Should Know to Stay Safe Poster

When done safely, trenching operations can reduce worker exposure to cave-ins, falling loads, hazardous atmospheres, and hazards from mobile equipment.

OSHA standards require that trenches and protective systems be inspected daily and as conditions change by a competent person before work begins.

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 away from the edge.
- It is free of standing water and atmospheric hazards.

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.

Protective systems for trenches:

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

Talk to your workers, your supervisors, and your subcontractors. Let's ensure trench safety procedures are being followed so this doesn't happen again

	**OSHA Press Release on Increase in Trench Related Fatalities** https://www.osha.gov/news/newsreleases/national/07142022 Also provides a link to the OSHA National Emphasis Program on trenching and excavations	
	**OSHA Trenching and Excavation Safety and Health Topic Page** https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/trenchingexcavation/index.html Excavation and trenching hazards and safety information	
	**NUCA Trench Safety Stand Down Webpage** http://www.nuca.com/tssd Tools and resources on excavation safety that are used for the annual trench safety stand down	
	**OSHA Trench and Excavation Publication and Videos** https://www.osha.gov/pls/publications/publication.athruz?pType=Industry&pID=213 and https://www.osha.gov/video/	
	**OSHA Technical Manual Trenching and Excavations** https://www.osha.gov/otm/section-5-construction-operations/chapter-2 Information on trenching and excavation	

Safety doesn't have shortcuts. You might save a minute but may lose your life.

Let's send everyone home safely at the end of the day.

This information has been developed by an OSHA Compliance Assistance Specialist and is intended to assist employers, workers, and others as they strive to improve workplace health and safety. While we attempt to thoroughly address specific topics [or hazards], it is not possible to include discussion of everything necessary to ensure a healthy and safe working environment in a presentation of this nature. Thus, this information must be understood as a tool for addressing workplace hazards, rather than an exhaustive statement of an employer's legal obligations, which are defined by statute, regulations, and standards. Likewise, to the extent that this information references practices or procedures that may enhance health or safety, but which are not required by a statute, regulation, or standard, it cannot, and does not, create additional legal obligations. Finally, over time, OSHA may modify rules and interpretations in light of new technology, information, or circumstances; to keep apprised of such developments, or to review information on a wide range of occupational safety and health topics, you can visit OSHA's website at www.osha.gov. **Incident information is based on the first report of the incident and may not reflect the final determination of the event.** For questions contact Jim Shelton at the Houston North OSHA office: shelton.james@dol.gov