

## OSHA Urges Safe Trench and Excavation Work Practices

Following a recent series of trench collapses in the Midwest, OSHA has published a [trade release](#) urging workplaces to take the necessary steps to safeguard workers from well-known trenching and excavation hazards.

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### Trenching and Excavation Hazards

The primary hazard of trenching and excavation work is employee injury or death from a cave-in. OSHA stated that 11 trench-related fatalities have been reported so far in 2025.

One cubic yard of soil can weigh as much as a compact car, making even a small cave-in potentially fatal. OSHA emphasized the critical importance of evaluating soil conditions before excavation begins, especially following heavy rainfall; wet soil significantly increases the weight and instability of trench walls, heightening the risk of collapse.

Proper training, site evaluation and the use of protective systems can help prevent these incidents.

### Key Safety Measures

To prevent cave-ins, employers must implement the following safety practices:

- Slope or bench trench walls at an angle inclined away from the excavation to reduce pressure.
- Shore the walls by installing aluminum hydraulic supports or other protective systems to prevent soil movement.
- Shield workers by using trench boxes or similar protective systems that guard against cave-ins.

Employers should train employees to know that no worker should enter a trench unless they are properly trained to identify potential hazards and the trench has been inspected by a competent person—a requirement under federal safety regulations. Here are five ways to further enhance employee safety in trenches:

1. Make sure there is a safe way to enter and exit the trench.
2. Ensure there is cave-in protection.
3. Keep materials away from the edge of the trench.
4. Look for standing water or atmospheric hazards.
5. Never enter a trench unless it has been adequately inspected.

OSHA states trenching and excavation operations continue to be a focus of its enforcement, with unprotected trenches representing a significant citation and penalty risk for employers.

When employers make safety their top priority, tragedies can be prevented and lives can be saved. Employers are encouraged to review OSHA's trenching and excavation safety guidelines and ensure all crews are equipped and trained to implement them.

Contact us today for more resources about safe excavating and trenching practices.