



Trenching and Excavation



As warmer weather slowly creeps in, there will be activities taking place that may require design, inspection or supervision by a competent person.

As a supervisor, it is your responsibility to assign a competent person to activities such as underground trenching and shoring.



OSHA defines a “competent person” as “one who is capable of identifying existing and predictable hazards in the surroundings, or working conditions which are unsanitary, hazardous, or dangerous to employees, and who has authorization to take prompt corrective measures to eliminate them.”

A “competent person”

- Has training in the use of protective systems.
- Is knowledgeable about OSHA requirements.
- Has authority to immediately evacuate workers from the excavation and ensure that hazardous conditions are addressed.

The primary hazard of trenching and excavation work is employee injury from a cave-in. Before workers enter a trench, a soil analysis should generally be conducted to determine the appropriate employee protection methods such as sloping, benching, shoring or shielding.

Employers should also consider potential struck-by hazards associated with heavy equipment, falling loads, and public vehicular traffic in close proximity to the excavation operations. Also consider potential hazards from undermining sidewalks and buildings.

Other unsafe conditions that may be encountered include hazardous atmospheres and electrical hazards from overhead and underground power lines.

These five key trench safety tips will help keep workers safe:

- Ensure that there's a safe way to enter and exit.
- Ensure trenches have cave-in protection.
- Look for standing water and test if atmospheric hazards are or may be present.
- Keep materials away from the edge of the trench.
- Never enter a trench unless it has been properly inspected by a competent person.

Employers can help ensure that excavations are safe to work in by directing a competent person to inspect excavations:

- Before construction begins.
- Daily before each shift.
- As needed throughout the shift.
- Following rain storms or other inclement weather.

Even if all the inspections are conducted, workers may still be in danger due to changing conditions.

Workers must be trained to report changes to the competent person/supervisor.

29 CFR 1926.21(b)(2) states: *“The employer shall instruct each employee in the recognition and avoidance of unsafe conditions and the regulations applicable to his work environment to control or eliminate any hazards or other exposure to illness or injury.”*

Training for excavation/trench work must follow the provisions in 1926 Subpart P and its appendices.

For more information go to:

www.osha.gov/laws-regs/regulations/standardnumber/

- 29 CFR 1926 Subpart P, Excavations. OSHA Standard.
- 1926.651, Specific excavation requirements
- 1926.651(k), Inspections



586-790-7810
www.camcomp.net