

WEEKLY SAFETY MEETING

FOR THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

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Mid South Sign Association

Job Name _____ Date _____

EXCAVATIONS AND TRENCHES

If your work involves digging ditches, excavations, or working in trenches, familiarize yourself with the protective systems and equipment designed to keep you safe. You are the person most invested in preventing cave-ins and other dangers, so recognize the hazards involved and take steps to help your employer ensure your safety.

The Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) defines an **excavation** as any man-made cut, cavity, trench, or depression in an earth surface, formed by earth removal. A **trench** is defined as a narrow excavation made below the surface of the ground. Generally, a trench is deeper than it is wide, and is no wider than 15 feet.

Cave-ins pose the greatest risk to construction workers and are more likely to result in worker fatality than any other excavation-related accident. OSHA requires that all excavations in which employees could potentially be exposed to cave-ins be protected by one of these methods:

- **Sloping or benching:** forming an incline or horizontal levels on the sides of an excavation.
- **Shoring:** using site-built structures (often timbers and planks or plywood) to support the sides of an excavation.
- **Shielding:** using permanent or portable structures

called trench boxes or trench shields to prevent the walls of the excavation from collapsing on workers.

Other potential hazards include falls, falling loads, hazardous atmospheres, drowning, and contact with underground power lines. A competent person will inspect excavations and nearby areas daily for possible cave-in hazards, failures of protective systems or equipment, and other hazardous conditions. But you should take an active role in ensuring your own safety. Be aware of your surroundings and remain attentive for signs of danger.

Although it's your employer's responsibility to ensure that there is safe access and egress for excavations 4 feet or deeper, you'll be the one working in the trench. Know the rules and requirements and make sure you have a safe way of getting in and out using ladders, steps, or ramps. Your life may depend on how quickly you can climb out of the excavation should the walls begin to collapse.

When you're working in a trench, always be alert for signs or sounds that may indicate a possible collapse. Before a bank gives way, there are some warning signs including flaking, when small bits of earth or rock fall from the wall. If you notice this happening, **get out right away!**

Never enter an unprotected trench!

SAFETY REMINDER

For more information on trenches and excavations, see Subpart P of 29 CFR 1926 at www.osha.gov.

Special Topics For Your Project _____

Employee Safety Recommendations _____

S.A.F.E. Cards® planned for this week _____

Reviewed MSDS # _____ Subject _____

Meeting Attended By _____

Supervisor's Signature _____

These instructions do not supersede local, state, or federal regulations.