

Toolbox talk

Year-round

5 minutes

Trenching and Excavation Toolbox Talk

Before anyone enters an excavation, confirm competent person inspection, safe access, spoil placement, utilities, water conditions, and the protective system for trenches 5 feet deep or more unless made entirely in stable rock.

READ ALOUD (ABOUT 5 MINUTES)

No one enters a trench because it looks okay. A competent person must inspect it first, including soil, water, vibration, weather, and the protective system.

For trenches 5 feet deep or more, we need sloping, shoring, shielding, or another compliant protective system unless the excavation is made entirely in stable rock. Keep spoils and equipment back from the edge.

Access matters too. Ladders, ramps, or stairs must be positioned so workers can get out quickly. If conditions change, everyone exits until the trench is reassessed.

INCIDENT EXAMPLE

A utility crew entered a short trench to adjust pipe alignment. A nearby loader passed the edge and the side wall sloughed into the trench. The crew had treated the exposure as routine because the task was quick.

CONTROLS TO COVER

- Competent person inspection before entry and after changing conditions.
- Protect trenches 5 feet deep or more unless entirely stable rock.
- Keep spoils, equipment, and traffic away from the edge.
- Provide safe access and egress within the required travel distance.

CREW DISCUSSION

1. Who is the competent person for excavation work today?
2. What changed since the last inspection?
3. Where are spoils, equipment, and traffic in relation to the edge?

QUICK QUIZ

1. At what depth does the protective-system trigger generally start?
5 feet, unless the excavation is entirely in stable rock.
2. Who inspects the trench before entry?
A competent person.
3. What should workers do if water or cracking appears?
Exit and have the trench reassessed.

Reference: 29 CFR 1926 Subpart P - OSHA treats trenching as high hazard because cave-ins can happen quickly and leave little chance of survival.

Toolbox Talk Sign-In Sheet

Attendance record for the talk above. Reviewers (OSHA, GC, ISNetworld/Avetta) expect topic, date, presenter identity, and attendee signatures.

Project / location

Date and time

Topic: Trenching and Excavation Toolbox Talk

Presenter (print)

Presenter signature

NAME (PRINT)	COMPANY / TRADE	SIGNATURE

Concerns raised and follow-up actions (owner, due date)