

OSHA Urges Caution on the Job during 'Trench Safety Month'

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SPRINGFIELD – The Illinois Department of Labor and Illinois OSHA are recognizing “Trench Safety Month” to remind employers to train employees and reinforce the risks associated with working in a trench.

The greatest threat while working in a trench is collapse. A cubic yard of soil can weigh as much as small car. Other hazards include falling loads, hazardous atmospheres and hazards from mobile equipment.

“Trenching is among the most dangerous jobs on a construction site, killing more than 20 workers every year. It only takes a few minutes for someone to be injured or killed by a trench collapse. There are specific rules and guidelines in place to prevent a tragedy on the job. Any casualty at a worksite is one too many,” said **Illinois Department of Labor Director Michael Kleinik**.

Before workers enter a trench, a competent person – someone designated by the employer with the authority and capability to identify and correct potential hazards – must assess the soil type, environmental risks and the appropriate measures to prevent cave-in.

Safety in a trench doesn’t stop after the soil is identified. Trenches more than five feet deep need protective systems in place. That could include sloping, shoring, shielding or benching. The appropriate protective system will be determined by soil, the size of the trench, weather and climate, and proximity to potential environmental hazards.

The competent person will be required to inspect the trench, surrounding area and protective system daily to prevent cave-in and to identify any new hazardous conditions. These inspections are required following changes in the weather and when other on-site work, such as blasting, takes place.

In addition to protections, employees must be provided specific entry and exit methods. Underground installations such as utilities, tunnels, shafts, vaults, foundations, and other underground fixtures must be shored, supported or otherwise protected.

The National Utility Contractors Association ([NUCA](#)), with the support of OSHA, will use June 14-18, 2021 as “Trench Safety Stand Down” week. It’s an opportunity for the industry to reach thousands of workers at hundreds of job sites across the country.

For more information on Federal and Illinois OSHA’s Trenching and Excavation requirements, visit <https://www.osha.gov/trenching-excavation>.