Keep Trenches Safe for Workers

Trench collapses and cave-ins are a serious threat to workers, but they can be prevented. OSHA reminds employers that worker safety is a priority, and the agency has resources available to protect workers.

The following safe work practices will help keep trenches safe for workers:

- **PREPARE a safe trench.**
  - Provide safe entry and exit before starting work.
  - Keep materials at least 2 feet away from the edge.

- **PROTECT workers from a cave-in by using protective systems.**
  - Sloping or benching trench walls, or
  - Shoring trench wall with supports, or
  - Shielding trench walls with trench boxes.

- **INSPECT the trench for hazards.**
  - Look for standing water and other environmental hazards.
  - Never enter a trench unless it has been inspected and approved by the competent person.

For more information on common hazards, visit OSHA’s [Trenching and Excavation](https://www.osha.gov) page.

Employers can also take advantage of OSHA’s [On-Site Consultation Program](https://www.osha.gov), which offers no-cost and confidential occupational safety and health services to small- and medium-sized businesses. Consultation services are separate from enforcement, and do not result in penalties or citations. Contact the [local OSHA area office](https://www.osha.gov) for assistance.

*OSHA alerts are issued on occasion to draw attention to worker safety and health issues and solutions.*