

TOOLBOX TALK #18

PLANNING FOR EXCAVATION SAFETY

Planning is a crucial step for excavation safety – one that may get overlooked by crews.

Part of that planning is making sure utility companies, or services such as 811 or Diggers



Hotline, are contacted to mark the location of utility lines before digging starts. Scheduled training may also be necessary, especially for inexperienced workers or those whose primary language isn't English.

In addition, plans may be needed to ensure equipment such as pipes, and even excavated soil (spoil piles) are kept at least two feet away from the opening of an excavation. It's an OSHA requirement.

Keep unauthorized persons away from the trench edge. Curious people sometimes wander too close to the edge of an excavation. In doing so, they may cause dirt or even rocks to fall into the excavation and onto workers below. To keep unauthorized persons away from a trench or excavation, barricades or signage might be needed. Employers must also make sure all the necessary tools and equipment are onsite.

Another important part of planning is making sure employees have a safe way of entering and exiting a trench or excavation. OSHA requires this for excavations that are four feet deep or deeper. Employers need to ensure the safe way of entry and exit, such as a ladder, is no more than 25 feet away from workers.

Good ways of making sure these things are addressed on your site is to have a checklist and having a pre-job meeting the morning of or the day before work begins. Making sure you have what you need before you need it will ensure work does not commence unsafely. Have all equipment checked off and employees sign off before any work begins on excavations.