

## **TOOLBOX TALK #26**

### **EXCAVATION COMPETENT PERSON**

Preplanning is paramount in excavation work. The designated competent person leading the operation takes a central role by mastering OSHA regulations and recognizing existing and potential hazards.

As required by OSHA, a competent person must inspect trenches before work starts, as well as after events in which conditions change or hazards increase, such as a rainstorm. Inspecting is important for trenches because the conditions change from day to day if a trench is open for a long period of time, or even for more than a day. Atmospheric hazards may also arise from work and could resemble those found in confined spaces.



A job near an underground natural gas line, for example, could warrant air sampling. Employers should call 811 before digging so utility workers can come out and mark the locations of underground lines. Further, crews working near old landfills should be mindful of a possible exposure to methane gas or hydrogen sulfide – an odiferous, toxic gas.

When performing his/her function, the competent person should ask the following questions:

- Is the cut, cavity or depression a trench or an excavation? Is it more than 4 feet deep? Does it contain water?
- Are there adequate means of access and egress? Are there surface encumbrances or exposure to vehicular traffic? Are adjacent structures stabilized?
- Is equipment operating near the trench or excavation? Does the equipment have warning systems?
- Does the trenching or excavating work require sloping, shielding or shoring? If shielding is used, does the shield extend 18 inches above the surrounding area if it is sloped toward the excavation? Is the depth of the cut more than 2 feet below the bottom of the shield?
- Is emergency rescue equipment required?
- Is there documentation of the minimum daily excavation inspection?