

## **TOOLBOX TALK #27**

### **TRENCHING AND EXCAVATION SAFETY- PREPPING FOR THE HAZARDS**



There are so many hazards in trenching and excavation work, most notably cave-ins and collapses. This is not the top killer of people in the construction industry, but we still lose too many workers every year just due to lack of planning. That is one of the most critical things. Before we put a shovel into the ground, before we bring any excavator or heavy piece of equipment, we have to plan for all of the hazards we could encounter, and that starts even before you get out on the site.

Management has to make sure that they call Diggers Hotline, the “call-before-you-dig” phone number or simply 8-1-1, and have them come out and mark for any known hazards that could be in the area. It is a good idea to photograph the area; make sure you have an indication. Because let’s be honest, those markings are not always accurate and that’s where some of the risk comes in. As you’re preparing, getting your documents and understanding what hazards you may face other than just the soil in any underground utilities, you have to take into consideration the type of soil you’re digging.

In regard to trenching and excavation, most people understand what soil is going to do. However, no matter what kind of soil it is, whether it’s Type C sandy soil or whether it’s stable rock, nature will always fill in any type of void we put in it. For example, at the beach, when building a sand castle moat, the sand tends to fall in, or when driving up in the mountains you may see falling rocks. Soil wants to fill back in, it is just due to the natural pressures of any void we create.

So once we understand that the hazard will always be there, then we can plan on different ways to go through and minimize the risks to the workers, whether that be through a protective structure or some sort of sloping or benching. There are many options within OSHA’s Excavation Standard so we can choose the right one that matches our task.

There is no better precaution in any construction operation to keep workers safe than to PLAN your work. Planning for the hazards will guarantee that we have what we need, before we need it. Because if it’s not there, bad decisions then are made.