

# HAZARD ALERT

CPWR  
THE CENTER FOR CONSTRUCTION  
RESEARCH AND TRAINING

# TRENCHES



## Am I in danger?

If the walls of the trench are **not**...

- ▶ **sloped or benched**
- ▶ **shored with supports**
- ▶ **shielded with a trench box**

And if the trench...

- ▶ has **not been inspected** by competent person
- ▶ does **not have a safe way to enter** or exit
- ▶ has **standing water** or a **hazardous atmosphere**
- ▶ has **equipment or materials close to the edge**



Unsafe trench

Then the answer is **YES**.

An unprotected trench can collapse in less than a second.

Never enter a trench unless it has been properly protected and inspected.

## How can a trench kill me?

Soil is very heavy. One cubic yard of soil can equal the weight of a mid-sized car. This amount of soil is so heavy it can crush you.



You could **die in minutes from a trench collapse**... even if your head and arms are above the soil.

**Trench walls may look stable, but DON'T TRUST them.**

### Find out more about construction hazards.

Get more of these Hazard Alerts—and cards on other topics:

call **301-578-8500** or  
visit **cpwr.com/hazardalerts**

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## Before you go in...

### 1 Find the “competent person”

OSHA requires employers to appoint a “competent person” on trench jobs. This person must inspect the trench every day before work, after rain, and when conditions change. When there is a problem, the competent person has the authority to stop work and fix the problem.



### 2 Work only in protected areas

The trench should be shielded, shored or sloped. Wear your hard hat. What is wrong with the jobsite on the right? The worker is outside of the trench box. There is no safe way to enter or exit. The worker is not wearing a hard hat.



### 3 Check your escape

It only takes a second for a trench to collapse. Always be aware of your escape route. If you are in a trench 4 feet or deeper, you must be within 25 feet of a ladder, ramp or stairway.



Photo courtesy Advanced Fiber Technologies Inc.

### Learn more about working safely in trenches:

- ▶ **OSHA Quick Card:** <https://bit.ly/Trenches-Quick-Card>
- ▶ **NIOSH “Preventing Worker Deaths from Trench Cave-Ins”:** <https://bit.ly/NIOSH-Trench>
- ▶ **CPWR Trench Fact Sheet:** <https://bit.ly/CPWR-Trenches>



### If you think you are in danger:

Contact your supervisor.  
Contact your union.

Call OSHA  
1-800-321-OSHA