

Landscape Management

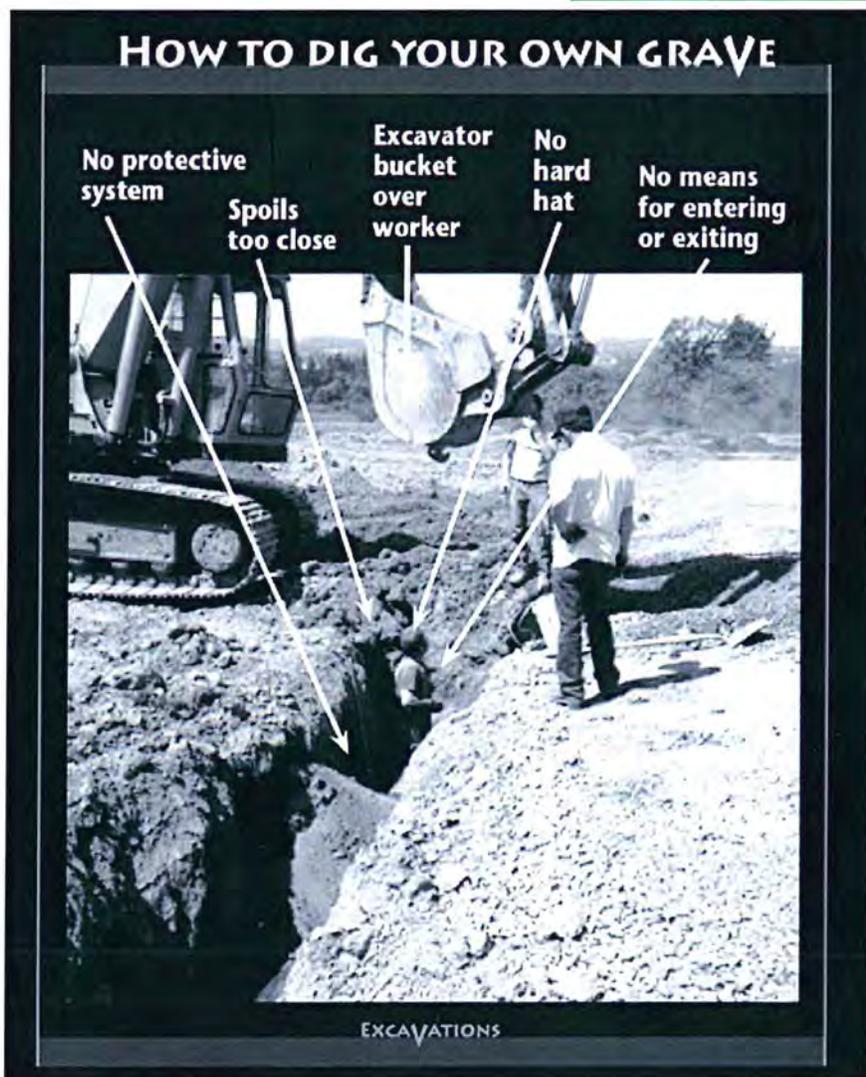
Trenching, Part 2: Steps for employers

Feb 4, 2009
By: Barbara Mulhern, T.J. Lentz
LM Direct!



In our [last article](#), we explained some hazards involved with trenching. What follow are some important steps to take to help protect your workers from serious injury or death in trenching/excavation activities:

- Plan ahead. Make sure all equipment is in good condition, that all utilities have been marked before digging, and that all electricity, gas and water pipes in the trench have been shut off.
- Ensure that a protective system such as sloping, benching, shoring or shielding is in place. The type of system used will depend on such factors as the excavation depth and width, the soil type, water content, nature of the work and any nearby activities that could increase the risk of a cave-in. Depths of more than 5 ft. require protective measures.
- Designate a "competent person" to oversee all activities. This person should have a greater level of training and experience than other workers. The competent person must be in the work area, must ensure that appropriate safety measures are in place before anyone enters the trench, and must act promptly to correct any problems.
- Conduct daily inspections and document findings.
- Ensure an adequate means of entry and exit. A ladder or other means must be no further away than 25 ft. from any worker.



Source: Excavations, Oregon OSHA, June 2006

- Keep heavy equipment and spoils at least 2 ft. from the edge of the excavation.
- Provide and require workers to wear hard hats and to use other appropriate safety equipment.
- Train all workers in a language and manner they understand. Ensure that they are aware of all potential hazards and that they comprehend safe trenching and excavation work practices. Develop a checklist for employees as a quick and easy reminder. Follow up training with a test that can be administered orally for workers who cannot read or write.
Reminder: When training your employees, be sure to take into account language issues, literacy level issues and cultural issues that could prohibit an understanding of your safety messages.
- Know that some sites require tabulated data. For this, you must enlist the assistance of a registered engineer and maintain documentation on site during construction.

Remember: Adherence to this guidance and following safe work practices during trenching and excavation activities can mean the difference between leaving the worksite safely to enjoy another day above ground... or not.

The authors wish to express appreciation to Laurie Erdman of The Bruce Co. of Wisconsin and Rick Rollo of Kujawa Enterprises, Inc. for their review of this article.