

# HAZARD ALERT

CPWR   
THE CENTER FOR CONSTRUCTION  
RESEARCH AND TRAINING

# TRENCHES



## Am I in danger?

If you enter a trench that isn't...

- shored
- sloped/benched or
- fitted with a trench box

And there isn't...

- a way to escape if it collapses and
- a "competent person"

Then the answer is **YES**.

An unprotected trench can collapse in less than a second.

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

## How can a trench kill me?

Dirt is heavy. Really heavy. One cubic yard of dirt is the weight of a mid-sized car.

One Cubic Yard



The weight of the soil is so heavy that it will crush you.

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

On average, more than three workers die every month from a trench collapse.\*

\*The Construction Chart Book, p. 39. CPWR. 2008.

## Find out more about construction hazards.

Get more of these Hazard Alert cards –  
and cards on other topics.

**Call 301-578-8500**

## Before you go in...



### 1 Find the 'competent person'

OSHA says every excavation job must have a person appointed by the employer as the competent person. 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 it.



### 2 Work only in protected areas

Work only inside the trench box or shored areas of the trench if the trench is not sloped or benched. Wear your hardhat.

Don't follow this worker on left: No ladder, no hardhat, not working in the trench box.



### 3 Check your escape

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

#### Find out more about safe work in trenches:

- Short OSHA video on prevention of trench collapse: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=cFYkeTOYk6k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cFYkeTOYk6k)
- OSHA's Quick Card on Trenching: [www.osha.gov/Publications/trench/trench\\_safety\\_tips\\_card.pdf](http://www.osha.gov/Publications/trench/trench_safety_tips_card.pdf)
- OSHA's definition of a competent person: [www.osha.gov/SLTC/competent\\_person/index.html](http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/competent_person/index.html)

Don't end your life  
in a trench.



Work safe. Every day.

**If you think you are in danger:**

Contact your supervisor. Contact your union.

**Call OSHA  
1-800-321-OSHA**