Safety Matters

Trench Safety Basics

Trenching and excavation are among the most hazardous construction operations. A trench is a narrow excavation, deeper than it is wide, with a maximum width of 15 feet. It is critical to understand the fundamentals of safely conducting work in and around trenches.

- **Ensure that your Competent Person (CP) is on site.** The CP should be trained and experienced in supervising trenching projects. They oversee the trenchwork to identify existing & predictable hazards associated with the trenching operation.

- **Inspect the trench and surrounding environment daily.** It is critical to inspect trench conditions before and during work. Factors such as standing water, surface cracks, or atmospheric hazards can significantly alter trench stability.

- **Keep equipment and materials away from edges of the trench.** To prevent hazards of rolling, sliding, falling, or cave-in, do not leave idle materials near the trench edges.

- **Use protective systems in trenches.** Before entering a trench greater than 5 feet deep, ensure that appropriate excavation protection is in place to prevent a cave-in. Protection can include sloping, shoring, or shielding (i.e., trench boxes).

- **Do not work under raised loads.** Be conscious of the Fall Zone - the area where suspended materials could land if securement fails.

- **Get help if needed.** If trench conditions appear to be unstable or unsafe, notify the CP to halt work and address concerns with appropriate corrective measures.