# 11-24-2025 - Toolbox Talk: Basic Excavation Safety

Sloping or benching the walls of an excavation can help prevent cave-ins IF they are cut to the required slope and angle. So never enter an excavation, even if the walls appear to be adequately sloped or benched, unless the Competent Person has cleared the excavation for entry. In addition, here are a few more safety tips to keep in mind when working in or near sloped or benched excavations:

• You don’t want something falling or rolling down into the excavation and striking someone. So always make certain that materials and equipment located outside of sloped or benched excavations are kept at least two feet or more away from the edges. And if necessary, use stakes, wedges, or chocks to secure rolling objects such as pipes or wheeled equipment in place and keep them from accidentally rolling or getting knocked into the excavation.

• Before you enter a sloped or benched excavation, as well as during the time you are inside the excavation, take a moment to check the soil along the top edges and sides of the excavation for signs of distress. This includes the formation of fissures or cracks forming parallel to one or more of the top edges of the excavation, bulging of the vertical face of the lower portions of the excavation, sloughing or spalling of the soil from the vertical faces of the excavation, and small amounts of material such as pebbles or little clumps of material suddenly separating from the face of an excavation and trickling or rolling down into the excavation (a condition called raveling). Report any signs of distress to the Competent Person so they can inspect the excavation and address any hazardous conditions if necessary.

• Avoid climbing up or down the sides of sloped or benched excavations to enter or exit unless you have been cleared to do so by the Competent Person. Even though they may appear to be safe to climb, the angles and steps of sloped and benched excavation walls are usually too steep for a person to walk on safely, and that can lead to you stumbling and falling. Unless the Competent Person confirms that the slopes or steps have been designed and constructed at angles and dimensions acceptable for walking up and down, only enter and exit excavations through means approved by the Competent Person. This includes means such as a properly installed portable ladder or properly constructed ramp designed by a Competent Person. One last thing; when working in trench excavations that are 4 feet or more in depth, always make sure your ladder, ramp, or other means of exiting the trench are located to require no more than 25 feet of lateral travel.

• Do NOT work on the sides of sloped or benched excavations at levels above other persons, unless measures approved by the Competent Person are installed. Examples include safety barricades or

shields that ensure the people below are protected from hazards created by dropped tools, sliding or falling materials or equipment, or even falling people.

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