

Trenching and soil excavation are very common and important aspects of most construction projects. Generally, these openings in the earth are for new construction or repair purposes. When done correctly, it can be a very safe work activity. However, if done carelessly, it can be deadly. ***Fatality rates for excavation work are 112 percent higher than rates for general construction. As a result, some of the largest fines proposed by The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) are due to excavation accidents.***

Excavated material (spoils) at your site are hazardous if they're placed too closely to the edge of a trench/excavation. The weight of the spoils can cause a cave-in, or spoils and equipment can roll back on top of workers, causing serious injuries or death.

How to Avoid Hazards

Provide protection by one or more of the following:

- Place spoils and equipment at least two feet away from the excavation.
- Measure from nearest part of the spoil to the excavation edge.
- Place spoils so rainwater runs away from the excavation.
- Use retaining devices, such as a trench box that will extend above the top of the trench to prevent equipment and spoils from falling back into the excavation.
- Where the site does not permit a two-foot set back, spoils may need to be temporarily hauled to another location.

