



COMPETENT PERSON FOR TRENCHING AND EXCAVATION

INTRODUCTION

- Review any incidents or “near misses” from the past week.
- Describe the hazards of the work as they relate to your project. Explain or show the SAFE way of doing the job.
- Give the **TOOL BOX SAFETY TALK**

What is a “competent person” for trenching and excavation? Why do we need one?

There are many hazards when digging trenches and excavations. Let’s look at this.

Did you know that a cubic yard of soil can weigh 3000 lbs., as much as a small car? (OSHA, n.d.). And if you are caught in a cave-in, the rescue team will have to take the time to make it safe for them to enter before it collapses on you? Valuable time when you are fighting for your life.

Here are some things to plan for before beginning the operation, and why a Competent Person is needed. This is what they have to look for:

- Traffic – are we working where people are driving or walking?
- Location and physical condition of nearby structures – what’s next to us? Could it collapse?
- Soil classification - is it safe to bench, or do we need to slope?
- Surface and ground water, and if there is standing water. Wet digs could collapse!
- Hazardous atmospheres from possible gas lines or decaying plant material
- Overhead and underground utilities – will we be using equipment that could hit an overhead powerline, or hit a buried electric or gas line?
- Weather – can we get out if there’s a storm?
- Protective systems that may be required, like trench boxes or shoring
- Fall protection needs – do we need to barricade the area?
- Number of ladders that may be needed – how quickly and easily can we get out?
- Other equipment needs.

OSHA requires that a “Competent Person” be responsible for the safety of all workers in a trenching/excavation operation. OSHA defines a Competent Person as “an individual who is capable of identifying existing and predictable hazards or working conditions that are hazardous, unsanitary, or dangerous to employees and who is authorized to take prompt corrective measures to eliminate or control these hazards and conditions.” The Competent Person is required to:

- Have training in soil analysis and the use of protective systems, be knowledgeable about OSHA requirements, and have authority to immediately eliminate hazards.



- Inspect the trench, adjacent areas, and any protective systems for possible cave-ins, failure of protective systems, hazardous atmospheres, or other hazardous conditions. Inspections must be performed daily: before work begins, throughout the shift, and after every rainstorm or other hazard increasing occurrence.
- Review a pre-task plan with supervisor on a daily basis.
- Assure that the location of underground installations or utilities have been properly located.
- Identify and ensure use of adequate protective systems, work methods, and personal protective equipment (PPE) on the excavation site.
- Test for low oxygen, hazardous fumes and toxic gases, especially when gasoline engine-driven equipment is running, or the dirt has been contaminated by leaking lines or storage tanks. Insure adequate ventilation or respiratory protection, if necessary.
- Provide safe access within 25 feet of workers into and out of the excavation.
- Provide appropriate protections if water accumulation is a problem.

Reference:

OSHA.gov (n.d.). <https://www.osha.gov/vtools/construction/soil-testing-fnl-eng-web-transcript#:~:text=One%20cubic%20yard%20of%20soil,bench%2C%20or%20shore%20the%20trench>