

Excavations: Water Changes the Entry Decision

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Why this matters

Rain or seepage can change the ground and protective arrangement. Pumping away visible water does not by itself establish that an excavation is ready.

Objective: Recognize water-related changes and verify reassessment before entry.

Key hazards or failure points

Water accumulation; softened ground; soil loss; changed support; blocked exit; unmonitored pumping.

Practical controls

- Have the competent person assess water hazards, ground conditions and required protection. Do not work in accumulating water without adequate precautions.
- Use the planned drainage or removal arrangement. When removal equipment controls water, the competent person must monitor equipment and operations.
- Keep the safe exit usable and agree withdrawal triggers. Reassess after rainstorms and other events that increase hazards.

Verify It in the Field

From outside the hazard area, report new seepage, runoff, cracks or soil movement. Do not enter to inspect or clear a pump.

Confirm the competent person's current inspection and any necessary soil/protection reassessment. Record the actual changed conditions and restrictions.

Verify the monitoring responsibility, equipment results and drainage destination under the plan. Confirm the exit and required release before reentry.

Stop and reassess

Leave by the safe route and hold entry for rising water, ground movement, failed controls or uncertain protection. Follow the emergency plan; do not improvise rescue.

Ask the crew

1. What has changed since inspection?
2. Who monitors water control?
3. What evidence permits reentry?

Use this HOP tool — Pause when unsure: Before entry, describe one change that would invalidate the last inspection. Have a worker explain the safe withdrawal route and who receives the report. Identify the competent-person findings and verified corrections needed before reentry; a reassuring appearance does not close the concern.

Sources: OSHA 1926.651; OSHA 1926.652; OSHA 1926 Subpart P Appendix A; DOE Vol. 2, pp. 16–17. HOP concepts adapted from DOE-HDBK-1028-2009, Vol. 2 (June 2009). No claim to original U.S. Government work; no government endorsement implied.

Free next step: JHA/JSA planning and field-verification worksheet

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/excavation-water-changing-ground