

Trenches: Verify Protection Before Entry

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Why this matters

A trench that was ready earlier may change after rain, added loads or moved protection. Verify the actual worker location and route before entry, then reassess changing conditions.

Objective: Identify current inspection evidence and protected access.

Key hazards or failure points

Cave-in; unprotected access; moving loads or equipment; utilities; water; hazardous atmosphere; damaged or mismatched protective systems.

Practical controls

- Have the competent person assess the excavation and required protection. Use the applicable design or manufacturer data for the actual conditions.
- Address utilities, access, edge loads, traffic, water and atmospheric hazards in the task plan. Keep unauthorized people and equipment away.
- Keep workers within the protected work arrangement. Do not move or alter protection informally, and do not enter to discover whether conditions are safe.

Verify It in the Field

From a safe position outside, identify the competent person and confirm the current pre-work inspection and any required reassessment after rain or other hazard increases.

Ask how the installed protection matches the ground, depth, loads and worker position. A trench box nearby is not evidence that the access route or task location is protected.

Check the planned access and exit, utility arrangements and other required controls with the competent person. Record the inspection/design reference, actual conditions, restrictions and recheck triggers.

Stop and reassess

Leave under the safe exit plan and hold entry for ground movement, new water, changing loads, moved protection, blocked access or an unresolved utility or atmosphere. Obtain competent-person reassessment and required corrections before reentry. Do not attempt an unplanned trench rescue.

Ask the crew

1. Who checked this excavation and when?
2. Is our route and actual work position protected?
3. What change means we leave and reassess?

Not soil-classification, protective-system design or rescue training.

Sources: OSHA 1926.651 and 1926.652; applicable design/manufacturer data.

Free next step: [JHA/JSA planning & field-verification worksheet](#)

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/trench-entry-protection-check