VIRGINIA PRO SERVICES

VPS TOOLBOX TALK

Trenching & Excavation Awareness

TRADE: GENERAL CONSTRUCTION	LEADER GUIDE: 8-12 MINUTES	USE WHAT FITS TODAY

LEADER NOTE

Do not read this sheet word-for-word. Pick the sections that match today's task, point to the actual equipment/work area, and get the crew to answer the questions out loud.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Excavations can collapse without warning. Protective systems, access and competent-person inspections are critical. Excavation conditions can change between one trip into the trench and the next. Soil, water, vibration, nearby loads and utilities all affect whether the protective system and access are still suitable. A competent-person inspection is a control, not a formality.

A SCENARIO TO DISCUSS

During Trenching & Excavation Awareness, the crew finds a utility, soil layer, buried obstruction, or condition that was not shown on the plan. The task can probably be worked around. What should stop until the new condition is evaluated?

BEFORE WORK STARTS

- Confirm the competent-person inspection is current and review soil, water, adjacent loads and protective system.
- Verify utilities are located/marked and conflicts are resolved before digging or entering.
- Confirm safe access/egress and keep spoil, equipment and materials controlled near the edge.
- Do not enter an excavation until the required competent-person inspection and protective system are in place.
- Keep spoil piles, equipment and loads back from the edge as required by the plan.

SAFE WORK SEQUENCE / CONTROLS

- Do not enter an excavation until the required competent-person inspection and protective system are in place.
- Keep spoil piles, equipment and loads back from the edge as required by the plan.
- Provide safe access/egress and keep it clear.
- Watch for water accumulation, vibration, adjacent structures, hazardous atmospheres and changing soil conditions.
- Reinspect after rain, vibration, equipment movement or any other condition that could increase the hazard.

COMMON FAILURE POINTS

- Entering after conditions changed without a new competent-person evaluation.
- Allowing spoil, equipment, water or vibration to load or destabilize the excavation.
- Treating utility marks or old drawings as a substitute for field verification.

STOP AND RESET IF...

- The competent-person inspection has not been completed or conditions have changed since the inspection.
- Water, cracking, sloughing, vibration, adjacent loads or utility conflicts appear.
- Required protective systems, safe access/egress or edge controls are not in place.

QUESTIONS THAT SHOULD CHANGE THE JOB

1. What did the competent person find in the latest inspection, and has anything changed since that inspection?
2. What protective system is being used, and does the actual depth, soil, water, and adjacent loading still match the plan?
3. Where is safe access/egress, and can every worker reach it without crossing an uncontrolled hazard?
4. What sign of cracking, sloughing, water, vibration, utility conflict, or equipment surcharge means everyone gets out?
5. What should stop until the new condition is evaluated?

MAKE IT REAL ON THE JOB

Walk the edge with the competent person and point out protective system, access and changing conditions.

BEFORE YOU RELEASE THE CREW

Before the crew starts, everyone should be able to explain the hazard, point to the control being used today, and name the condition that would make the work stop.

Reference: 29 CFR 1926.651 + 1926.652 - Excavation Requirements and Protective Systems

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ATTENDANCE & SIGN-OFF

Trenching & Excavation Awareness

Project / Job:		**Date:**	
Talk leader:		**Location:**	

CREW ACKNOWLEDGMENT

By signing, attendees confirm they participated in this toolbox talk and had the opportunity to raise job-specific questions. Signatures do not replace required training, qualifications, permits or certifications.

#	Name	Company / Trade	Signature
1			
2			
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QUESTIONS / CONDITIONS / CORRECTIVE ACTIONS

END-OF-TALK CHECK

[ ] Crew can point to the main hazard.	[ ] Critical control is in place and usable.
[ ] The responsible person/check is clear.	[ ] Stop/re-brief conditions were discussed.