Caught-Between Hazards in Construction Meeting Kit



WHAT’S AT STAKE

In construction, caught-between hazards can turn a regular workday into a tragedy in seconds, getting pinned between heavy equipment, crushed by shifting materials, or trapped in a trench collapse isn’t just possible; it happens more often than people realize. These incidents are fast, violent, and often deadly, leaving workers with life-changing injuries or worse.

WHAT’S THE DANGER

Caught-between incidents are one of the “Fatal Four” in construction, and for good reason. These events happen fast, often without warning, and can leave workers seriously injured, trapped, or worse. The danger isn’t always loud or dramatic; it could be something as simple as standing in the wrong spot at the wrong time.

Trenches and Excavations – Silent and Sudden

You may not think much of hopping into a shallow trench to lay pipe or run cable. But soil is heavy; one cubic yard can weigh more than a car, and it doesn’t need a warning to collapse.

- Without trench boxes, shoring, or sloping, walls can cave in instantly
- Even “short” trenches under 5 feet can bury or crush a worker in seconds
- Changes in moisture, vibration from nearby equipment, or poor spoil placement can all trigger collapses

Heavy Equipment and Blind Spots – You Won’t Win That Fight

Working near machinery like excavators, forklifts, or dump trucks? You’re often in a danger zone, and operators can’t always see you.

- Being pinned between a machine and a wall, barrier, or parked vehicle is a common cause of serious injury
- Reversing equipment is especially dangerous if spotters or cameras aren’t used

- Even a slow-moving machine can trap and crush if you're caught in the swing radius or tail end

Shifting Loads and Stored Materials

You don't have to be inside a trench or near a dozer to get caught. Unsecured pallets, pipes, or panels can shift suddenly, especially during loading or unloading. One unstable stack can tip and pin a worker in seconds.

It Happens Fast, and It Happens Quietly

That's the most dangerous part; these aren't dramatic movie-style accidents. There's often no time to react, no alarm sounding. Just a momentary lapse, and you're trapped. Whether it's a trench giving way, a boom swinging closer than expected, or a load sliding from a trailer, the damage is immediate and often severe.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Caught between hazards don't give you much warning – they happen fast, and often without a sound. That's why protecting yourself starts with staying aware, knowing where the danger zones are, and not cutting corners when it comes to safety. Whether you're in a trench, around heavy equipment, or handling materials, small decisions can make a huge difference.

Trenches Can Collapse Without Warning

Never get into a trench without the proper protective systems in place – that means trench boxes, sloping, or shoring, no exceptions. Even shallow trenches under 5 feet can cave in and trap a worker. Watch for signs of unstable soil, like cracking or water seepage, and keep spoil piles at least 2 feet from the edge. If you ever feel unsure, stop and get a supervisor involved – better safe than buried.

Stay Out of Blind Spots and Equipment Paths

- Always make eye contact with operators before entering their work zone.
- Use spotters when working around reversing equipment.
- Never assume a machine operator sees you, even if you're wearing high-vis.
- Avoid walking or standing between a machine and a wall, vehicle, or stack of materials – that's where many crush injuries happen.

Don't Stand Where Things Can Swing or Shift

Booms, buckets, panels – anything that moves can trap you in an instant. Stay clear of swing radiuses and never stand under a suspended load. Loads can shift or fall without notice, especially during lifting, unloading, or when ground conditions change.

Secure Loads and Stack Materials Safely

- Use straps, chocks, or blocking to secure materials during storage and transport.
- Don't stack materials too high or on uneven ground.
- Step away if a load starts to shift – never try to catch it.

- Be extra careful when unloading from trucks or trailers — that’s when many caught-between injuries happen.

Speak Up and Trust Your Instincts

If something looks or feels unsafe, it probably is. Don’t ignore your gut report concerns, ask for help, or stop the task until it’s made safe. Safety isn’t just about rules; it’s about watching each other’s backs and making sure everyone goes home in one piece.

FINAL WORD

Caught-between hazards don’t always come with noise, warning signs, or second chances. One moment of inattention, one shortcut, or one unsafe decision can lead to life-changing injuries or worse.
