Cave-in Kills Backhoe Operator

A 53-year-old backhoe operator was killed, and his son seriously injured, when the wall of a trench they were working in caved in.

The victims were part of a four-person crew that was installing drainpipe in a trench measuring about 16 feet (about five meters) deep, 15 feet wide (4.5 meters) and 60 feet (18 meters) long. The trench was not sloped, shored or shielded. The spoils pile was positioned directly at the edge of the trench. Access to and from the bottom of the trench was a sloped section that formed a ramp, and was located at the opposite end, approximately 60 feet (18 meters) from where the workers were stationed. The soil was heavy, dense clay which contained some moisture. Tree planting had previously disturbed the soil.

The backhoe operator’s son was at the bottom of the trench when the side caved in, trapping and injuring him. The backhoe operator and the project superintendent jumped into the trench to rescue him, when a second cave-in occurred, killing the backhoe operator.

- Do you provide the appropriate type of protective system for all trenches?
- Do you have a person on the job- site who can identify hazards and has the authority to take prompt corrective measures?
- Do you have an emergency plan in place? Are your employees trained in this plan? Have you provided an appropriate method of egress?
- Are trenching hazards covered in your accident prevention plan?