Excavation Safety Stats & Facts



FACTS

1. Trenched areas sometimes have depleted oxygen levels, and the atmosphere can also be contaminated by toxic gases and chemicals.
2. Hitting utility lines when digging can cause electrocution and material gas leaks.
3. Before digging, have an expert examine soil stability.
4. Develop and have employees practice a trench collapse emergency plan.
5. Hiring a professional engineer or a qualified professional to design a system that prevents cave-ins is critical to prevent injury and jobsite fatalities.

STATS

- The OSHA investigations showed that schedule time was more important than safety in 88 percent of the incidents. Seventy-two percent of the fatalities occurred in trenches less than nine feet deep. Only nine percent occurred deeper than 15 feet.
- The most commonly killed employees were construction laborers (53%), with plumbers and pipe fitters following next at nine percent. Most (58%) were killed while installing pipe.
- Fifty-six percent of these fatalities were Hispanics, and 52 percent were foreign-born. For 44 percent, Spanish was their primary language. At least 30 percent had been working for their employer for less than a year, and most (59%) worked for a subcontractor.
- Only six percent were union members. Since, nationwide, about 20 percent of construction work is union, the expected rate of union fatalities would be near 20 percent. The lower rate suggests that union jobs are safer, that supervisors and workers on union sites are better trained and that the union offers the kind of protection that workers need to speak up about safety issues on the worksite.
- Just over half the employers had a written safety and health program, but, of these, only 40 percent covered trenching. Sixty-five percent provided no trench safety training. Most employers (71%) had never been inspected by OSHA, but 21 percent had been previously cited by OSHA for trench safety violations.
- About three in every four fatalities occurred at residential worksites. Most companies were small; 42 percent had fewer than ten employees.

Though, typically, five or less workers were present on the site when the incident occurred, most of the projects (52%) involved contracts worth $100,000 or more.