



# LOSS CONTROL NEWSLETTER

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*Auto-Owners*  
INSURANCE

## Trenching Hazards

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there were 104 construction industry fatalities between 2011 and 2016 due to trenching and excavation work. One of the most dangerous hazards at these sites is unexpected cave-ins.

You may be surprised to learn that a cubic yard of soil can weigh as much as a car. When a cave-in occurs, workers can be badly injured or killed. These tragedies can be prevented when workers are properly trained and the required safety measures are established.

### WHEN IS IT SAFE TO ENTER A TRENCH?

A worker should enter a trench only if it has been inspected by an expert who is capable of identifying hazards or conditions that are unsanitary, dangerous or unstable due to standing water.

A worker can safely enter and exit using means such as ladders, steps or ramps when all equipment and material is positioned away from the edge. There must also be cave-in protection measures installed for trenches 5 feet in depth or greater, unless the trench is cut from stable rock.

### PROTECTIVE SYSTEMS FOR TRENCHES

Some protective systems for trenches are simple, but others may have to be designed by a registered, professional engineer. A trench protective system may include the following elements to protect workers from cave-ins:

- Trench walls should be sloped away from the excavation. The maximum allowable slope will vary depending on the type of soil and how long the trench will be open. The walls may also be benched with one or more tiers.
- The trench should be “shored,” meaning the walls should be braced to prevent the movement of soil.
- Trench boxes or shields, usually made of steel or aluminum, should be used in the trench between the side of the excavation and the work area.

### OTHER HAZARDS

Other hazards workers may be exposed to during trench or excavation activities include falling material from lifting or digging equipment. To prevent falling material and vehicles from entering a trench, barricades or stop logs may be installed, hand or mechanical signals must be used, and soil should be graded away from the excavation.

In addition, the atmosphere in a trench may be different from that at ground surface level. The area is considered hazardous if it is explosive, flammable, poisonous, corrosive, oxidizing, irritating, oxygen-deficient, toxic, or otherwise harmful.

If there is the potential for a hazardous atmosphere, respirators must be available, and workers should be trained on how to use them.



## Safe Driving in Work Zones

No one likes to see road signs and orange cones indicating upcoming road construction, especially if you're running late. However, drivers who are distracted or speeding in these areas put construction or maintenance workers in great danger on roadways.

Many areas have implemented "Give Us a Brake" campaigns to educate drivers on best practices to prevent accidents or fatalities in roadwork areas. By following these tips, you can do your part in making sure our roadways are safe workplaces.

1. Pay attention – there may be sudden changes in traffic flow, like speed reductions and shifted lanes.
2. Never talk or text on a cellphone and avoid other distractions, like eating or loud music.
3. If a flagger is directing traffic, follow all of his or her instructions.
4. Turn on your headlights – rain or shine, day or night.
5. Keep a safe distance between your vehicle and construction workers, barriers, equipment or trucks.

## Emergency Exits: Your Way Out

When a fire or other emergency happens at your facility, it is important to know how to get outside and away from danger quickly. Although these events are unpredictable, being prepared and remaining calm may save your life.

You should be able to locate the exits nearest to where you work. A direct route will allow you to quickly evacuate the building. However, you should also know the locations of additional exit doors in case your primary evacuation route is inaccessible.

After exiting the building, move away from doors and go to your facility's designated assembly area. Be aware of your surroundings, and do not get in the way of emergency responders.

Be vigilant to ensure that emergency exit doors remain unlocked from the inside. If you see a locked exit door at your facility, notify your supervisor immediately. It is also important that these doors and the paths leading to them are free of obstructions and clutter.

Never store anything that will block an emergency exit door. Good housekeeping practices can save precious time during an emergency and also save your facility from potential OSHA fines.

**If you have any questions or need assistance regarding workplace safety, please contact your independent insurance agent or the Auto-Owners Loss Control HelpLine at 855.586.5388, or send an email to [LossControlSupport@aoins.com](mailto:LossControlSupport@aoins.com).**

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