



Trench collapse

A site foreman was fined after a labourer was killed following a trench collapse in Scotland that ended with tragic consequences

The incident is a timely reminder of the need for us to prevent danger when working in or near excavations and to maintain the required precautions by carrying out inspections.

The man was part of a team working on a sewer replacement project. He was walking along the side of a three metre deep trench when it collapsed beneath him and he fell into the trench.

As he began to make his way out, the trench wall collapsed on top of him. Although efforts were made to dig him out, tragically the man was pronounced dead at the scene.

A Health and Safety Executive investigation established that there was no edge protection to the trench and that the sides of the trench had not been supported to make them safe. The HSE Inspectors also found that trench boxes that were available had not been used.

Structural Safety

Structural collapses can range from walls, which fall because their foundations are undermined by nearby excavations, to buildings which collapse during alteration works because the structure was weakened and/or overloaded. Structures can also collapse unexpectedly during demolition if action is not taken to prevent instability. Scaffolds collapse because ties are either forgotten or removed too early during striking, or the scaffold is overloaded. Structures under construction may also collapse, e.g. steel frames that have not been adequately braced, or formwork that is prematurely loaded.

Points to consider when working with excavations:

What you must do:

- You must prevent danger to workers in or near excavations.
- Maintain the required precautions by carrying out inspections.

Inspections:

Must be carried out by a competent person who fully understands the dangers and necessary precautions that need to be in place to ensure work can be carried out there safely. Excavation supports or battering must be inspected at the start of the working shift and at other specified times. No work should take place until the excavation is safe. These inspections should take into account of:

- Any event likely to have affected the strength or stability of the excavation
- Any material unintentionally dislodged or falling into the excavation

For issue to: All Employees ✓ Divisional Employees ✓ External Contractors ✓
 Issued by: Mark Rowe – SHEQ Advisor AMD
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 Mobile/Mobex: 07712 779772 / 50247

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