

Toolbox Talks 2

078: Unsafe Conditions: Trenching

Discussion leader duties for this session:

Review any company policies related to trenching.

What this Safety Talk covers:

This Safety Talk addresses unsafe conditions that might arise during trenching.

Discussion notes:

Unsafe conditions related to trenching

- No buried objects survey. If this condition exists, don't do the work.
- The survey is outdated. Many utilities have limits on how long a survey is good for. Whether this is the case or not, make sure nothing has been buried since the survey was taken. If in doubt, find out.
- It looks like another trench was recently dug, but this isn't shown on the survey. That's a sign your survey isn't current. If in doubt, find out.
- Part of the trenching route is outside the buried objects survey. This situation typically arises when there's a last minute change of plan. Sometimes, that's because the planned trenching route is simply not possible due to surface objects, such as fences. No matter the cause, you can't trench outside the surveyed area.
- You don't have the ramps or other equipment needed to get the trencher off the trailer. Don't try to make up for this with back muscle.
- You don't have the phone numbers of the local gas and electric utilities and the means to phone them. Even if you have a current survey, there's always the chance you'll hit something you're not supposed to. If that happens, you need to contact the appropriate utility company immediately.
- Site owner interferes. Sometimes the site owner wants to "supervise" the trenching. This is not a good situation, for many reasons. If the site owner is raising a legitimate issue that you need to address, that's one thing. If the site owner doesn't let you do your job, contact your foreman.
- People want to talk to you while you're working. Whether you're unloading the trencher or operating it, this kind of distraction leads to accidents. Obviously, you're not there to chat. But the other person may need to address a legitimate concern to you. Stop what you're doing, rather than trying to do it and talk at the same time. If you can answer this person's concerns quickly, do so. Otherwise, refer the person to your foreman.
- Trench route crosses traffic area. In addition to the distractions and other safety implications for you, this situation poses a danger for those who are walking (or driving) across the trench route. Rope off the route and establish an alternate traffic path before starting.
- Trench route is on a hill. To be safe in this situation, you need to position yourself such that you are never "downhill" of the trencher.
- Trencher is digging up debris. If your trencher's pulling up metal strapping, roots, and other debris, it can jam up. If you can't change the route to eliminate this problem, you'll need to shut off the trencher before you reach in to unjam it.

Review and discussion

1. What should you do if you don't have a buried objects survey?
2. How can you know if your buried objects survey is up to date? What should you do if it's not?

4. If you arrive on the site and see long lines of disturbed turf but the survey doesn't show anything buried, what might this mean? What should you do?

6. Why do you need the contact information for the utilities before starting any trenching work?

[Note to Presenter: You need a means of getting the trencher off the trailer (or truck) and back onto it.]

9. Suppose you need to cut a trench at a factory. Your trench route is going to cross a footpath from the employee parking lot, across one of the driveways leading to that lot, and across a lift truck route. What should you do before trenching?

Participant's Signature and Date

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