

Safety Alert – Trench collapse

Excavation collapses are particularly dangerous. They can occur quickly, limiting the ability of workers to escape, especially if the collapse of a trench is extensive.

Before starting, obtain all relevant utilities' plans by calling 1100 – Dial before you Dig.

The speed of an excavation collapse increases the risk associated with excavation work. The consequences are significant - falling earth can bury or crush a person in its path. This can result in death by suffocation or internal crush injuries.

Trenches and excavations are high risk and need to be designed and excavated in a safe manner with appropriate means of entry and exit. Collapse or cave-ins are more likely when working on previously dug soil.

Construction work including work connected with an 'excavation' carried out in or near a trench with an excavated depth of greater than 1.5 metres is 'high risk construction work' for which a Safe Work Method Statement (SWMS) must be prepared.

When conditions change onsite you must stop the work immediately and obtain support to plan an effective safe means of undertaking work before recommencing tasks.

Zone of Influence

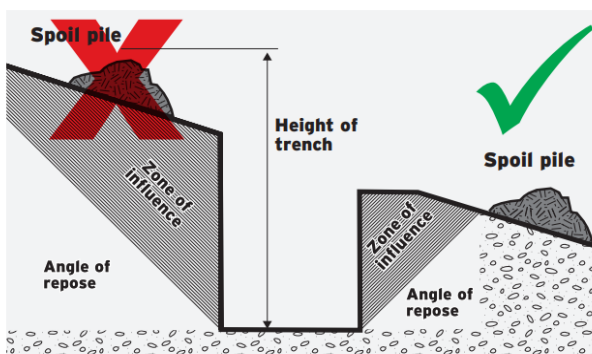
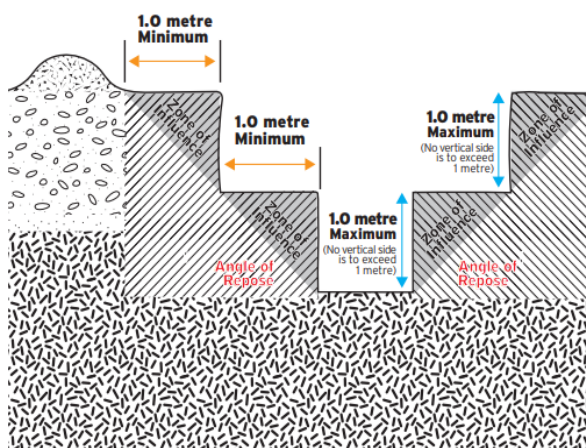


Figure 4.2 Placing material on the lower side of the excavation will reduce the effective height of the excavation (see diagram above) and the risk of material falling or being washed into the excavation.

Ground collapse control



Recommendations:

- All trenches should be risk assessed and appropriate controls implemented regardless of depth.
- At a minimum - benching, battering or shoring the sides of the excavation in excess of 1.5 metres deep.
- Barricade or flag trenching or excavation.
- Check surrounding soil for fretting, water, slumping, cracking or ground swelling before entering.
- Take care when moving loads in or out of a trench or excavation to avoid damaging struts or walling.
- Corners **MUST** be battered back or shored when 2 or more trenches cross.
- Plant and material **MUST** be kept a minimum of 1 metre from the zone of influence.
- Ladders **MUST** be at intervals not less than 30 metres along the trench.
- Don't work alone in a trench or excavation without a safety observer at the surface to monitor conditions.
- Don't leave trenches open too long; backfill as soon as possible. Consider backfilling the trench as work progresses.
- Ensure rescue planning and response procedures are in place and workers are familiar with their requirements.

For further information refer to: [Code of Practice - Excavation work](#)