Trench Collapses and Buries New Worker

A new worker with little safety training died when the trench he was digging caved in around him. The 35-year-old plumber had been on the job for just two days. He was in a trench connecting a residential sewer line to a sewer main when the incident occurred.

The backhoe operator, working as part of the two-man crew had just finishing digging the trench and was swinging the backhoe bucket out of the seven-foot-deep hole when the victim jumped in to finish digging. Neither benched nor sloped to prevent cave-in, the walls of the trench collapsed and completely buried the man.

Take responsibility for your own safety. Ask for job-specific training before performing any new or unfamiliar task. The victim in this case was provided with no safety orientation or training of any kind. The company had a written safety program, held tailgate meetings and had formal safety meetings. However they followed a 12-month cycle, which meant new employees could work a full year before receiving the job-specific training needed to perform duties safely. Newly hired employees were supposed to receive a safety orientation on the first day of employment, but the victim did not receive it before work began.

Source: California Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) Program, Case Report 05CA002