Trenching and Irrigation – Landscaping Meeting Kit

WHAT’S AT STAKE

Trenching and installing irrigation systems is inherently dangerous and challenging work that requires a comprehensive safety protocol.

WHAT’S THE DANGER

Trenching and installing irrigation systems are dangerous activities because of the risks of cave-ins, workers falling into the trench, and accidental severing of utility pipes. Trenches can be a source of suffocation deaths as well as sprains and fractures.

Common hazards include:

- Cave-ins
- Falling into trenches causing sprains and fractures
- Cutting existing utility lines
- Hazardous atmosphere

Incident example

- A landscape worker was using an excavator to dig a trench for an irrigation line. The bucket inadvertently ruptured a natural gas line. The worker had not located the gas line by hand before starting and misjudged the location.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Initial Trenching and Irrigation Safety Checklist

- Check the location of underground utility lines by calling the appropriate utility authority.

- If the trench will be more than 1.2 m deep, plan for sloping or shoring the sides, unless no worker will be in the trench. Consult a professional engineer.
- Secure or remove any buildings, trees, utility poles, rocks, or other hazards.
- Ensure that workers will not be closer to the edge of the trench than the trench is deep.

On the Job

- Wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), including steel- toe boots and work gloves.
- Wear close-fitting, full-length clothing.
- Never get into a trench that is deeper than your knees.
- Never sit or lay in a trench.
- Limit the amount you trench to what you can complete and backfill in one day so you don’t leave a trench unattended.

Finishing up

Rope off or cover unattended trenches.

Responsibilities of Employers

- Maintain and repair trenching equipment.
- Provide barricades and signage to prevent falls into trenches.
- Train workers on the safe use of trenching equipment before they start work.
- Demonstrate how to use and store the trencher.
- Demonstrate how the safety features work (for example, guards, shields, and automatic releases), and instruct workers not to remove any of these features.
- Demonstrate how to lock out the equipment before clearing any jams or performing repairs or maintenance.
- Remind workers about the PPE they are required to wear.
- Provide adequate supervision after training.

FINAL WORD

Never guess or take a chance. Always call the appropriate local authority before one starts a trenching operation.