

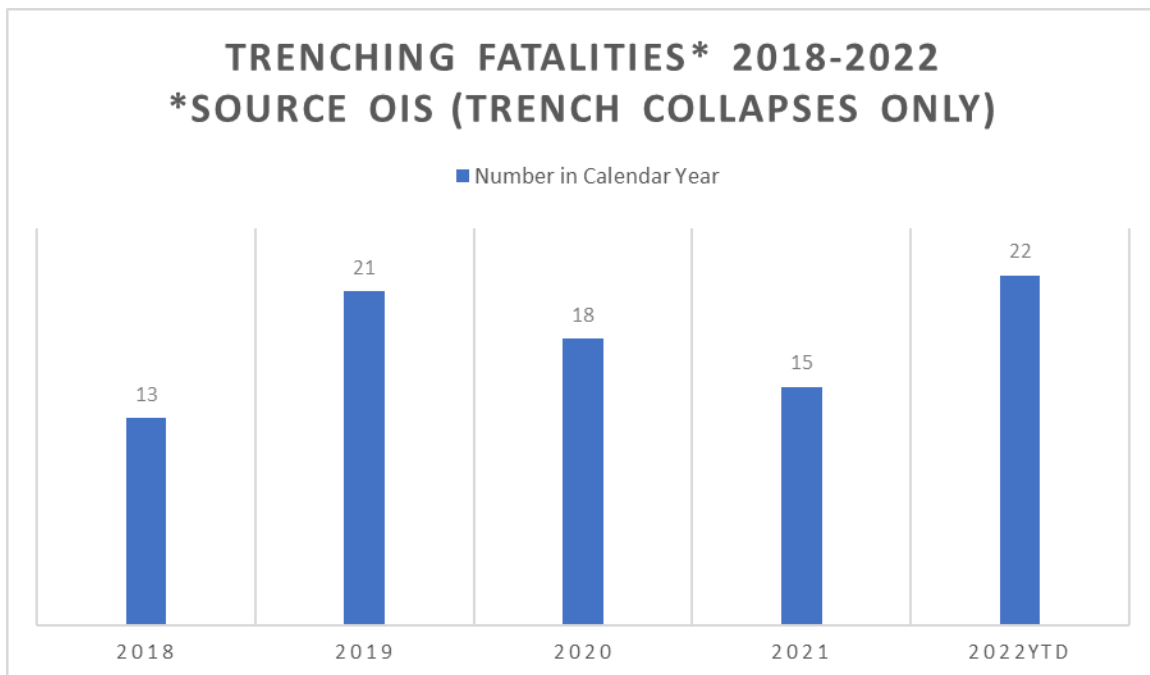
Assistant Secretary of Labor Doug Parker responds to increase in trenching related fatalities

DATELINE – Assistant Secretary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health Doug Parker today issued the following statement in response to an alarming increase in trenching fatalities across the country:

“Today, I am calling on all employers engaged in trenching and excavation to immediately take action to ensure that protective measures are fully in place every single time employees are working in or near a trench.

An alarming number of workers are dying and getting seriously injured in trenching incidents across the country. Every one of these tragedies is preventable. Work in and around trenches can be safely performed by complying with OSHA standards. There simply is no excuse for workers to lose their lives time and again from cave-in hazards when the solutions are so well-understood. Our message to employers on this matter is simple: “Slope it, Shore it, or Shield it” to protect your workers.”

Trenching fatalities have dramatically increased in CY 2022 at an alarming rate in a short 6-month period of time. “We need everyone to step up and do their part to prevent these needless tragedies.”



This terrible trend is highlighted by a recent incident on June 28th in Jarrell, Texas, where two workers, aged 20 and 39, lost their lives while digging an unprotected trench that was more than 20 feet deep. Trench shields, which could have saved their lives, sat unused beside the trench.

To help deter actions that disregard the dangers of trenching hazards, I have directed OSHA enforcement staff to consider every available tool at the agency's disposal – including criminal referrals for federal or state prosecution – to hold employers and other responsible parties accountable when their actions kill workers or put their lives at risk. I have asked state OSHA plans to consider similar measures.

This year, Federal OSHA will perform more than 1,000 trench inspections under our National Emphasis Program for Excavations. Every state plan has a similar program. Under this emphasis program, our compliance officers may stop by, and inspect, any excavation site they pass in the course of their day. We have also reminded our staff to be on the lookout for trenching hazards. We also urge workers to contact their local OSHA or state plan office, or call us at 800-321-OSHA, if their employer is requiring them to work in or beside trenches that are not sloped, shored, or shielded and are five or more feet in depth.

“The agency stands ready to assist any employer that needs help complying with our trenching and excavation requirements, and will conduct outreach programs, including safety summits, in each of our ten regions to help ensure any employer who wants assistance gets it. I encourage any employer wishing to take advantage of these resources to also contact OSHA.”