



“Alarming Rise in Trench-Related Fatalities Spurs US Dept of Labor to Announce Enhanced Nationwide Enforcement...22 workers have perished in the first half of 2022 .”

—Headline from OSHA

The recent rise in trench fatalities has rocked the excavation shoring industry. What is really going on and what is a responsible employer to do? To answer that, let’s look at the last 2½ years of data and see if we can make any sense of it.

METHODOLOGY

It’s important to know how statistics are gathered. The federal government works on a Fiscal Year (FY) of Oct 1 – Sept 30. So, let’s examine the available specific data on fatalities in and around trenches for FY 2020, FY 2021, and FY 2022 to date.

DATA

OSHA reports fatalities on this website, <https://www.osha.gov/ords/imis/accidentsearch.html>:

The screenshot shows the OSHA website's search interface. At the top, there is a red header with the United States Department of Labor logo and social media icons. Below the header, the text "Occupational Safety and Health Administration" is displayed. A navigation bar contains links for "CONTACT US", "FAQ", "A TO Z INDEX", "ENGLISH", and "ESPAÑOL". A search bar is labeled "SEARCH OSHA". Below the search bar, the text "Fatality and Catastrophe Investigation Summaries" is displayed. A paragraph of text explains that these summaries are developed after OSHA conducts an inspection in response to a fatality or catastrophe. Below the text, there is a "Search By:" section with three input fields: "Description:", "Abstract:", and "Keyword:". A note at the bottom of the search section reads: "Note: Please read important information below regarding interpreting search results before using."

FY2020

- 33 fatalities in and around trenches
- 14 caused by trench collapse
- NO shoring in the trench in any of the collapse incidents
- 9 of the 14 wall collapse incidents occurred between 12 pm and 5pm, suggesting the unsupported walls had time to dry out and cave in after several hours.
- Deceased ranged in age from 24-67, with an average age of 43 years
- Average depth 10 ft suggesting that routine work is often fatal
- One contractor experienced two separate fatal incidents in 2020

FY2021

- 25 fatalities in and around trenches
- 18 caused by trench collapse
- NO shoring in any of the collapses except for one, where the collapse occurred in the open end of a shield.
- 14 of the 18 wall collapse incidents occurred between 12 pm and 5pm
- Deceased ranged in age from 25-87, with an average age of 44 years
- Average depth 9.7 feet

FY2022 (partial)

- 22 fatalities in and around trenches (15 of the 22 are visible on the fatality search site noted above)
- 10 of the 15 were caused by trench collapse
- NO shoring in any of the collapse incidents.
- 8 of the 13 wall collapse incidents occurred between 12 pm and 5pm
- Deceased ranged in age from 21-54, with an average age of 34 years
- Average depth 9.3 feet

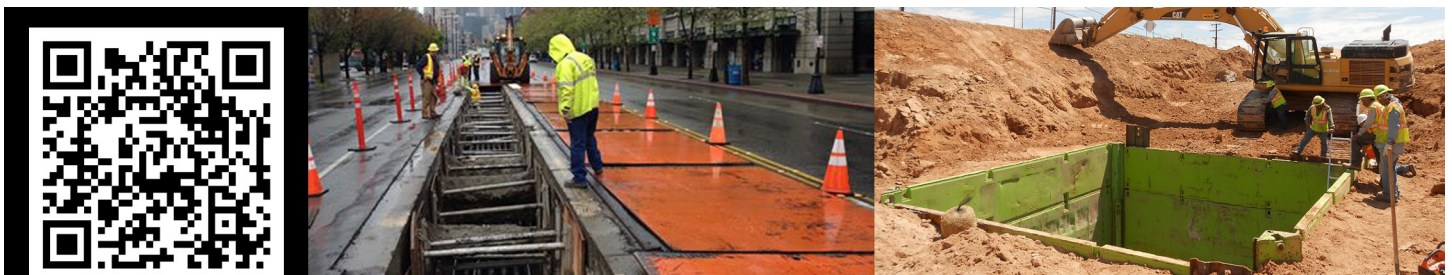
KEY CONCEPT

Dodge Construction Network reported significant increases in several categories of construction activity in October of 2021, coming off of two years of the COVID pandemic. The new federal Investment in Infrastructure and Jobs Act may also contribute to new activity. Combined with the younger average age of deceased workers and an increase in the number of fatalities in and around trenches, this may suggest a shortage of workers to accomplish an increasing number of projects. It is understandable that less seasoned workers would have less training, and, without fully understanding the dangers, might be less cautious, causing them to neglect safety procedures or agree to work in unsafe trench environments.

RESPONSE

Employers and supervisors must recognize that younger employees merit higher levels of training and supervision. Contractors can also prepare for increased inspections by authorities overseeing construction safety.

Disclaimer: This document does not provide or address all information, laws, standards, regulations, codes, requirements and safety measures applicable to excavations, trench protection and shoring options. Readers should comply with all applicable laws, standards, regulations, codes, requirements and safety measures relating to excavations, trench protection and shoring options.



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