

Working in and around excavations

A recent observation has highlighted the need for regular risk assessments to be done on excavations throughout the whole process.

It was established that adequate trench protection had not been provided on one of our sites. At the same time, it was also identified that there was insufficient edge protection to one side of the excavation.

At the time of the observation, crews were stopped and spoken to regarding the current condition of the excavation. These discussions were about what could be done better to make the excavation safe.

The excavation was originally used for testing sections of pipeline. Once this work was completed, the excavation was made deeper to allow for valves to be installed and wrapped.

This resulted in the trench shield being lowered further into the excavation to protect the sides at the base of the excavation. The outcome of doing this was to expose the top of the excavation which meant protection was removed from that area.

The entry and exit into and out of the excavation was also compromised by the extra depth.

Due to the excavation being exposed for an extended period of time, the sides had become compromised and some undermining had occurred.

Excavations and trenches pose risks of collapsing and burying workers, falls into them, unsafe atmospheres, water and other hazards, and the danger of striking underground services.



To ensure we prevent harm associated with being in or around excavations, we should always:

- Check the excavation at the start of every day or shift and after any event that may affect its stability.
- Provide safe access to get in and out of the excavation.
- Prevent collapse with protection methods such as shoring, benching or battering back.
- Never assume the walls of the excavation will stand up unsupported. Ground movement can be unpredictable.
- Prevent people and materials falling in by providing adequate edge protection. This must be strong enough to stop a person from falling into the excavation and also to prevent tools and materials from entering the excavation.
- Ensure all items, including plant and equipment, are always at least 1 metre from the edge of the excavation.

Remember, communication is the best tool we have to keep each other safe.