

Unattended Trenches

Best Practice Guide

&

Sample Company Policy

BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

Unattended Trenches

For the purpose of this section of the policy the following definitions are true unless otherwise indicated:

- **Trench** An excavation which is narrow in relation to its length, made below the surface of the ground in excess of three feet below grade and the depth of which is, in general, greater than the width, but the width of the trench, as measured at the bottom, is no greater than 15 feet
- **Unattended Trench** refers to a trench where neither the, excavator, or any of the people who are engaged in construction activities are present to manage access
- **General Public** is all natural persons not engaged in construction activities at the trench site
- **Site Specific Plan** refers to the packet including this policy containing all of the documentation regarding this issue
- **Excavator** refers to any entity including, but not limited to, a person, partnership, joint venture, trust, corporation, association, public utility, company or state or local government body or public agency which performs excavation operations including the excavation of trenches
- **Competent Person** is defined by OSHA in 29 CFR 1926.32(f) as “one who is capable of identifying existing and predictable hazards in the surroundings or working conditions which are unsanitary, hazardous, or dangerous to employees, and who has authorization to take prompt corrective measures to eliminate them.”
- **Supervisor** refers to the individual assigned to make sure the policy is followed
- **Barricade** is a device(s) used, but not limited to, fencing, signs, cones, jersey barriers for the purpose of preventing access or warn the general public and excavators of a potential hazards

Guide

Summary

In 1999, a young girl was buried when she entered an unattended trench in her Massachusetts neighborhood. Tragically, the trench collapsed and she died. Ten years later, Massachusetts enacted a law regulating unattended trenches. The law stipulates that local authorities may collect a fee for each trench (meeting the standards) and inspect the site (although not required) to ensure compliance.

Maine State Representative Connor of Kennebunk submitted a bill {[LD 1094](#)} at request of the girl's family to protect people in Maine. The workgroup developed a plan which includes;

- Informing parents of potential hazard on construction sites with specific reference to unattended trenches through a public information campaign
- Training excavators on the hazards of unattended trenches and suggested mitigation measures
- Sample policy available for adoption by excavators

Excavators may order free stickers (*see sample right*) from www.jackiemoorefund.org to place on equipment to remind operators to protect the site during breaks and after hours.



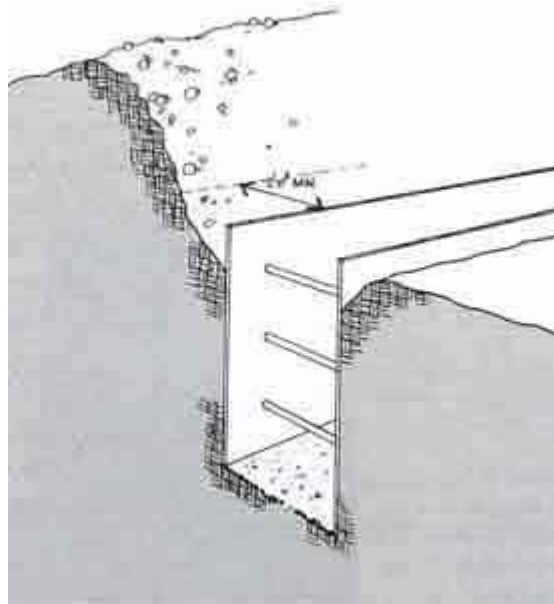
More information on jobsite safety is available online at www.cautionkids.com

Jobsite Planning

Prior to the start of each job, a survey will be completed by supervisor to determine if work requires trenching operations and could possible result in unattended trenches. If a determination finds possible locations the excavator will determine the correct measure to mitigate the hazard prior to trenching whenever possible.

The excavator will inform employees and subcontractors who perform daily operations involved with trenching of the potential hazard and methods of mitigation on each individual trench.

If the jobsite pre planning survey determines excavations may include unattended trenches the following should occur:



1. Supervisor will complete the company form “Unattended Trench Plan”
2. Prevention methods
In preplanning the supervisor should decide the necessary materials needed to mitigate the hazard
3. Training
Employee(s) and or necessary subcontractors on the jobsite will receive training on execution of the site specific plan.
4. Surroundings
Supervisor should examine area in immediate vicinity of the possible unattended trench to assist in consideration of mitigation methods
5. Contractual Obligations
Contracts may require or specify methods to protect unattended trenches. Requirements should be reviewed in pre-planning, communicated on the jobsite and executed.

Understanding the Hazard:

As defined, an unattended trench, creates a possible hazard for the general public. The specific concerns are:

- Children
- Vehicles
- Disabled or impaired individuals

Children

Children may be attracted to the construction site specifically in areas where population density places the site near homes, schools or play areas. Limiting access to the site or any construction site will increase the awareness for parents and children.

Vehicles

Motorists add another potential hazard for unattended trenches. Protection in high traffic areas should be designed to allow vehicles to safely pass the work area if possible and without entering the trench.

Disabled or impaired individuals

Individuals who may not have the ability to recognize hazards in general due to physical or mental limitations are a higher risk.

Reducing the access to unattended trenches by the general public will reduce the risk assumed by the excavator or injury or death causes by fall or collapse.

Recommended action to mitigate the risk:

Excavators should design the mitigating methods by assessing the following:

- ***Relationship of unattended trench to potential hazards***
 - Vehicles
 - Children
 - Population centers such as parks, shopping centers, schools, churches, elder care facilities

- ***Available methods for mitigating the risk and does the site permit those measures*** (i.e.; availability of space)

- ***Time and or duration of the unattended trench***
 - Coffee/Lunch Break
 - Overnight
 - During School vacations/breaks/recess
 - Long periods of time
 - Could the weather conditions change impacting materials

- ***Will the surrounding conditions change throughout the day effecting the possible hazard by***
 - Increased traffic
 - Increase in general public
 - Use of the area (special events, etc)

- ***Access Points***
 - Can the general public access the unattended trench
 - Is the site enclosed with secure or limited entry points

Selecting the Barricade:

The excavator should design the barricade depending on the risk assessment. In some cases the risk might include multiple methods of barricade devices while others might include limited design.

Supervisors should consider the time, duration, locations when making decisions on the best practice for reducing the risk to the general public. The excavator may also eliminate the unattended trench by appointing a competent person to observe the site and or backfilling the trench.

Below are recommended methods to consider:

- ***Backfilling***

In ideal situations the risk may be eliminated or reduced by backfilling the trench especially during overnight breaks

- ***Fence***

Depending on the site location and hazard assessment the use of a fence could vary from portable chain link fence, permanent fence around sites with long term

construction or in conjunction with other security efforts, plastic safety “snow” fence

- **Jersey Barricade**
Common for sites where vehicle hazards are the primary concern
- **Signs**
Use of warning signs which may or may not include photos depicting hazards, trespassing notices, multiple languages
- **Traffic Cones**
Used to warn drivers & pedestrians
- **Steel Plate**
Setup to be level on the site and at least ¾” thick

Communication & Inspection

Supervisor should communicate the plan with employees and subcontractors involved the operation of trenching activities and assign competent person, preferably a jobsite foreman, to ensure the trench has a plan and is followed.

Supervisor should also plan to inspect sites during times where trenches may typically be unattended to check compliance with company standards in the interest of the general public.

Included at the conclusion of this guide is a one page notice which may be adopted for areas with high population densities or large amount of children and placed at residences or common areas.

Also included is a sample PowerPoint™ which most public access stations can place on their broadcasts informing parents and residents of potential hazards associated with construction. Contractors must consider the area and specific hazards to determine use of materials. The file can be downloaded online at www.cautionkids.com

“Insert Company Name” Unattended Trenches Policy

I. Policy:

“Company” respects the community for which it works and values the integrity of human life. “Company” therefore adopts this policy to protect the general public from injury or death as a result of incident associated with an unattended trench. It is also the policy of “company” for employees to be familiar and adhere to regulations set forth by the Occupational Safety & Health Administration.

II. Purpose:

Establish standard practice to be applied in situations where a trench may become unattended by definition.

III. Definitions:

- **Trench** An excavation which is narrow in relation to its length, made below the surface of the ground in excess of three feet below grade and the depth of which is, in general, greater than the width, but the width of the trench, as measured at the bottom, is no greater than 15 feet
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IV. Procedures:

Employees of “company” should use the following methods to protect an unattended trench. Each unattended trench may require specific methods to protect the general public and employees should consider the potential hazards associated with the location of the trench in relation to the surroundings. Urban environments will most likely require different procedures from rural or highway environments.

A. Assess the Hazard

- i. Supervisor should inspect the hazard including the surrounding area looking for potential risks such as schools, elder living, playgrounds, dense residential population
- ii. Fill out the General Information Form listing the basic information about the job and post in a central location accessible to all employees
- iii. Use the Emergency Contact form to update local emergency and post in a central location accessible to all employees
- iv. Fill out the Project Task & Hazards worksheet outlining the potential unattended trenches and post in a central location accessible to all employees

B. Select the method for protection

- i. Determine the best possible protection including backfilling, fencing, barricades, cones, caution tape, steel plate or other method suited to provide protection

C. Place signs outside the perimeter

- i. Use “company” approved signs notifying the public of the potential hazard including contact phone number

D. Inform Public

- i. Decide if signs will suffice as public information or additional methods required including leaflet at nearby homes, schools or public access television

V. Training:

Train employees on jobsite hazards and remedies for protecting the general public when an unattended trench may exist. Indicate the location of forms used and record training sessions.

General Information

Job # _____ **Job Title** _____

Start Date: _____ **End Date:** _____

Project Location: _____

Project Owner(s): _____

Project Contacts

General Contractor				
Job Title	Name	Cell Phone	Email	
<u>Project Manager</u>				
<u>Foreman</u>				
<u>Safety Officer</u>				

Subcontractor Contacts:

Subcontractor				
Type	Company	Office Phone	Contact	Cell Phone

Emergency Contacts

Agency Type	Agency Name	Address	Contact	Local Phone
Rescue/Fire/Police				
Utility				
Non-threatening Medical				
OSHA				

Please check if Emergency Contact Numbers are clearly posted in a pre-designated/visible location. Also note, 911 calls are routed to the Maine State Police and could delay response. Using the local emergency phone number may increase response time.

