



Safety Tip of the Month

Help Stop the Spread of Flu

Flu season is a reminder that small actions can protect the people around us. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), getting vaccinated each year is the best way to reduce the risk of seasonal flu and its potentially serious complications. Everyday habits can help prevent the spread of flu and other respiratory illnesses, too.



Keep Your Distance

Avoid close contact with people who are sick. If you become ill, give others space to help protect them.

Stay Home When You Are Sick

You can return to normal activities when, for at least 24 hours, your symptoms have been improving overall and you have had no fever without using fever-reducing medication. Take added precautions around others for the next five days.

Cover Coughs and Sneezes

Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue, then throw it away. Wearing a well-fitting mask is another step you can choose to help protect yourself and others.

Keep Your Hands Clean

Wash them often with soap and water. If those are unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth, especially after touching shared surfaces.

Make the Air and Your Surroundings Cleaner

Bring in fresh outdoor air when possible, consider air filtration, and clean frequently touched surfaces such as doorknobs, handrails, and countertops.

Healthy habits matter as well. Getting enough sleep, staying active, managing stress, drinking fluids, and eating nutritious food all support your overall well-being. Together, these steps can help protect you, your coworkers, and your family throughout flu season.

Source: [CDC, "Healthy Habits to Prevent Flu"](#)

Trenching Safety

Never Take a Chance on a Cave-In

A trench can look stable one moment and collapse the next. Cave-ins are the greatest danger in trenching and excavation work, and they can be fatal. That is why every trench requires careful planning, the right protective measures, and an inspection before anyone enters.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) identifies three primary ways to protect workers from a cave-in:

- **Slope or bench** the trench walls by cutting the soil back at an angle or in steps.
- **Shore** the walls with supports designed to prevent soil movement.
- **Shield** workers with a properly installed trench box or other protective structure.

The right method depends on conditions at the site, including the type of soil, trench depth, water, nearby equipment, and materials placed close to the edge. A trench that was safe earlier may become dangerous after rain, vibration, or a change in the work area.

Know what must happen before entry. OSHA generally requires a protective system for trenches 5 feet deep or more unless the excavation is entirely in stable rock. A trench less than 5 feet deep may also need protection if a competent person identifies a potential cave-in hazard. Protective systems for trenches 20 feet deep or more must be designed or approved by a registered professional engineer using the methods specified by OSHA.

A competent person must inspect the trench and its protective system before workers enter. This person must be able to recognize hazards and have the authority to correct them promptly. Inspections are required daily before work begins and as conditions change, including after a rainstorm. If an inspection reveals a hazard, workers must leave the area until it is made safe.

Make sure workers can get out quickly. Trenches 4 feet deep or more must have a safe way to exit, such as a ladder, stairway, or ramp, within 25 feet of workers. Keep access points clear, and never assume you can climb the trench wall in an emergency.

Watch what is happening around the trench. Keep excavated soil, tools, and other materials at least two feet from the edge so they do not fall onto workers or add pressure to the walls. Keep heavy equipment back from the edge, and stay clear of suspended loads. Before digging, locate underground utilities. Be alert for standing water and hazardous atmospheres, which can create additional dangers even when a cave-in protection system is in place.

Trenching safety is everyone's responsibility. If the protective system is missing, an exit is blocked, conditions have changed, or something does not look right, stay out of the trench and notify the competent person. Taking time to address a hazard before entering can save a life.

Related Article:

[**OSHA, Trenching and Excavation Safety**](#)



Photo caption: HC trench box in Fairbanks, Alaska.

Situational Awareness

See the Hazard Before It Becomes an Incident

A familiar work area can change quickly. Equipment moves, weather shifts, materials are relocated, and another crew begins a task nearby. A space that was safe at the start of a shift may present a new hazard an hour later. Situational awareness helps us recognize those changes and respond before someone gets hurt.

Situational awareness means paying attention to what is happening around you, understanding how it could affect your work, and thinking about what might happen next. It applies whether you work at a construction site, in a warehouse, on the road, or in an office. The question is: **What has changed, and does it affect my safety or someone else's?**

Look beyond the task in front of you. Before starting work, take a moment to scan the area. Where are people and equipment moving? Are walkways clear? Do you see a spill, a damaged cord, an unsecured load, or a change in the weather? Think about hazards that have occurred during similar work, what is happening now, and what could happen as the task progresses. Continue checking your surroundings throughout the day, especially after a break, a shift change, or the arrival of another crew.

Pay attention when conditions change. A new piece of equipment, an unfamiliar chemical, poor lighting, or a blocked exit can alter the risks of a routine job. Distractions, fatigue, and stress can also make it harder to notice warning signs or make sound decisions. If a situation feels rushed or unclear, pause long enough to assess it. Confirm what you know, identify what you still need to know, and choose the safest way forward.

Communicate what you see. Noticing a hazard only helps if the right people know about it. Tell your supervisor and anyone who may be affected where the hazard is, what is happening, and who or what may be at risk. Be specific. Make sure instructions are understood, and ask questions when responsibilities or next steps are unclear.

Act before work continues. If you identify a hazard, follow your organization's procedures to address it. A simple hazard may be something you are trained and authorized to correct. Other situations require a supervisor or qualified person to evaluate and control the risk. Until the hazard is addressed, keep others away from the affected area and do not proceed with work that would expose someone to danger. Whenever possible, removing the hazard is more effective than relying only on protective equipment or reminders to be careful.

Every employee has a role in speaking up about unsafe conditions. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) states that workers have the right to a safe and healthful workplace, information and training about workplace hazards, and the ability to report safety concerns without retaliation. Employees also help protect one another by following safety procedures, sharing changes in conditions, and reporting hazards promptly.

Situational awareness is a habit practiced throughout the workday. Notice what is happening. Think about what could happen next. Communicate clearly. Take action. Those few steps can prevent a routine task from becoming an emergency.

Workplace Safety

Ten Everyday Rules for a Safer Workplace

Workplace safety depends on the decisions we make throughout the day. The “10 Rules for Workplace Safety” poster reminds us that preventing injuries means paying attention to changing conditions, using equipment correctly, and looking out for one another.

- 1. Take responsibility for safety.** Your actions can affect you and your coworkers. Follow established procedures, speak up when you see a hazard, and let others know when conditions change.
- 2. Work to prevent incidents.** Consider what could go wrong before starting a task and make sure safeguards are in place. Report near misses, too. They may reveal a hazard that still needs to be corrected.
- 3. Do not take shortcuts.** Safety procedures exist for a reason. Follow the approved process, even when the job is familiar or time is limited. If you cannot follow it as written, pause and ask for direction.
- 4. Work within your training.** Do not operate equipment or perform a task unless you have the required training and authorization. If you are unsure how to proceed safely, ask before you begin.
- 5. Use the right tools and equipment.** Choose tools designed for the job, inspect them before use, and operate them correctly. Remove damaged equipment from use and report it according to workplace procedures.
- 6. Assess the risks.** Look at both the task and the surrounding area. Consider moving equipment, electrical hazards, weather, chemicals, and nearby workers. Reassess when conditions change.
- 7. Dress for the task.** Wear footwear suited to the work and conditions. Around machinery or moving parts, avoid loose clothing or accessories that could become caught. Follow your work area’s clothing requirements.
- 8. Avoid horseplay.** Practical jokes, rough behavior, and unnecessary distractions can lead to injuries, especially around tools, vehicles, and equipment. Give others the attention and space they need to work safely.
- 9. Practice good housekeeping.** Keep walkways and exits clear, clean up spills, store materials securely, and put tools away. An orderly work area helps prevent slips, trips, and falling objects.
- 10. Wear the required protective gear.** Personal protective equipment (PPE) must be appropriate for the task. Wear it correctly, check its condition, and replace damaged items.

Before starting work, ask yourself: “Am I trained, do I have the right equipment, and have I checked for hazards?” Keep asking as the job progresses. Safer workplaces are built through the choices we make every day.



Fall Protection Safety

Preventing Falls Starts With Recognizing the Risk

A fall can happen from a roof, a ladder, a stairway, or a wet floor. Some falls cause serious injuries; others are fatal. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 844 workers died from falls, slips, and trips in 2024. The risk is especially significant in construction, but hazards exist in every workplace.

Falls often involve more than one contributing factor. A worker might step around materials left in a walkway and lose footing on a wet surface. Someone using a ladder might reach too far because it was set up in the wrong place. Recognizing the conditions around a task, as well as how the task is being performed, is the first step toward preventing an injury.



Watch for Hazards at Every Level

When working at heights, look for open holes, unguarded edges, missing or damaged guardrails, and ladders or stairs in poor condition. On the ground, watch for spills, mud, ice, uneven pavement, loose mats, cords, hoses, and tools in walkways. Poor lighting can make any of these hazards harder to see.

Plan Work at Heights Before it Begins

If a task can be done safely from the ground, consider that option first. When work at heights is necessary, use the fall protection required for the job. Guardrails and other physical barriers can prevent a fall. Where a personal fall arrest system is required, workers need a properly fitted harness, compatible equipment, and an approved anchor point. Inspect equipment before use, and do not begin until you understand how to use it.

Use Ladders Correctly

Choose a ladder suited to the task, inspect it, and place it on a stable surface. Maintain three points of contact while climbing, and keep your body centered between the side rails. If you cannot reach your work without leaning to one side, climb down and move the ladder. Never use a damaged ladder or stand on a step that is not approved for use.

Keep Walking Paths Clear

Good housekeeping protects everyone who passes through a work area. Clean up spills promptly and warn others about wet surfaces. Store cords, hoses, tools, and materials out of walkways; keep stairs and exits clear; and dispose of debris regularly. Report damaged flooring, loose tiles, broken steps, and poor lighting so they can be corrected.

Warning signs help alert people to hazards, but they do not replace correcting the condition. If you find an open hole, a damaged guardrail, or another serious fall hazard, keep others away and notify the person responsible for making the area safe. Whether the work is taking place several stories up or on the same floor, taking a moment to assess your surroundings can prevent a fall.

Falling Into Fall

A New Season, a New Set of Safety Hazards

Fall brings cooler mornings, outdoor gatherings, and weekends spent on projects at home. It also brings changes that are easy to overlook. Daylight fades earlier, weather can shift quickly, and familiar roads and walkways may become harder to navigate. A little preparation can help prevent an injury.



Adjust to changing road conditions. Fog can limit visibility, while rain and fallen leaves can make pavement slippery and hide potholes. Allow time to clear frost or condensation from all your windows before driving. For longer trips, check the forecast and the condition of your tires, lights, windshield wipers, and fluids. Keep basic emergency supplies, including water, a flashlight, and a phone charger, in case of breakdown or delay.

Give yourself time to reach your destination. Slow down when visibility or traction is poor, leave more space between vehicles, and avoid distractions. If your plans include alcohol, arrange a sober ride in advance. Never drive impaired or ride with someone who is.

Look out for children. With school in session, expect children near bus stops, school zones, and neighborhood crossings. Slow down and watch for people walking or riding bicycles, especially during the morning and afternoon commute. Yellow flashing lights on a school bus mean it is preparing to stop. When its red lights are flashing and the stop arm is extended, stop and wait until the signals are off and the bus begins moving before proceeding.

Take care with home projects. Before clearing gutters, trimming branches, or working overhead, choose the right ladder, inspect it, and place it on a firm, level surface. Keep three points of contact while climbing, and move the ladder instead of leaning to reach farther. Wear protective gear suited to the task, and keep children and pets clear of the work area. Watch your footing: wet leaves can make steps, decks, and walkways slippery. Even in cooler weather, remember to drink water, take breaks, and use sun protection when needed.

Keep gatherings safe. Use propane and charcoal grills outdoors, away from the home and anything that could catch fire. Keep children and pets back, and never leave a lit grill unattended. Check that the grill is clean and in good condition before you start cooking.



Before you travel, start a project, or welcome friends over, take a moment to check the conditions and make a safe plan. As the season changes, that pause can protect you and the people around you.

Four-Step Reporting Process

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Report ALL bodily injuries (workers compensation), property damage (automobile/building), and near misses/close calls. Below are the four steps for reporting an incident:

**EVALUATE**
Evaluate the situation & determine if 911 should be called. When in doubt call 911.

**CONTACT**
Contact your supervisor. Be prepared to give them the following information:
Who, What, Where, and When.

**CALL**

Call your local Health and Safety team member:

Michelle Brickie	(UICGS) (Hawaii)	907.677.5219
Carl Nayakik	(UICAOD) (Utqiaġvik, AK)	907.600.9896
Mauricio Gueco	(UICCS) (Anchorage, AK)	907.600.9233
Kevin O'Shea	(BT) (Anchorage, AK)	907.677.5292
Ron Hoon	(UICGS) (Lead, PA)	717.422.6626
Martanaze Hancock	(UICGS) (Springfield, VA)	703.399.9477
Aaron Ludwick	(UICGS) (Colorado)	719.729.3863
Kenneth Scott	(UICGS) (Maryland)	443.252.7074
Michael Timo	(UICGS) (Portland, OR)	571.319.9490
Michael Hawkins	(UICGS) (Fac. Mgt.) (Springfield, VA)	703.405.0314
Bernice Oyagak	(UIC Municipal) (W&S) (Anchorage, AK)	907.677.5204
Jason Howard	(UICGS) (Crane, IN)	812.854.5294
Christopher Monetta	(UIC) (Springfield, VA)	540.656.0740

**COMPLETE**
Complete & return the **INOI** (Initial Notification of Incident) form(s).

Piyagqutailakta

Let Us Go Without Injury

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