



# NEWS

**JB Pritzker, Governor**

**Jane R. Flanagan, Acting Director**

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Illinois Department of Labor Recognizes June as “Trench Safety Month” as Construction Season Heats Up**

**SPRINGFIELD** – The Illinois Department of Labor (IDOL) and its Division of Occupational Safety and Health (IL OSHA) are recognizing June as “Trench Safety Month,” and June 20<sup>th</sup>-24<sup>th</sup> as “Trench Safety Stand Down Week.”

One in every five deaths in the workplace is a construction worker, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Trenching and excavation work can be extremely dangerous. In fact, one cubic yard of soil can weigh as much as a car. Trench collapses were responsible for 17 worker deaths in 2018, the most recently verified statistics show.

“Worksite safety is critical to making sure every worker gets home safely at the end of the day. We encourage construction employers to take the opportunity this month, and on a regular basis, to speak with their employees about staying safe on the job,” said **Illinois Department of Labor Acting Director Jane Flanagan**.

In April, a worker in Illinois was repairing a water main when the trench, without cave-in protection, collapsed. The worker was trapped nearly chest deep in mud and sludge. While emergency responders were on the way, a second worker got stuck trying to rescue the first. Both were freed and the employee who was working in the trench was air lifted to a trauma center. Fortunately, the worker was relatively unharmed, but could have easily lost his life. IL OSHA investigated the incident and cited the employer for violations of the excavation standard.

“Close calls like these can be avoided when the appropriate steps are taken at a worksite. That includes properly training employees and identifying ‘a competent person’ – someone designated by the employer with the authority and capability to identify and correct potential hazards in a trench – to prevent cave-in,” said **Illinois OSHA Acting Division Manager Erik Kambarian**.

There are [five pillars](#) to trench safety:

- Ensure there's a safe way to enter and exit

- Ensure trenches have cave-in protection
- Look for standing water and test if atmospheric hazards are or may be present
- Keep materials away from the edge of the trench
- Never enter a trench unless it has been properly inspected by a competent person

The National Utility Contractors Association ([NUCA](#)) encourages employers to use this month as an opportunity to speak with employees about safety, specifically trench and excavation hazards.

For more information on Federal and Illinois OSHA's Trenching and Excavation requirements, visit <https://www.osha.gov/trenching-excavation>.

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