

Safe excavating

Before beginning an excavation, employers and workers should stop to consider what steps to take to work in and around an excavation safely. As a reminder, practitioners should stop and consider the following before carrying out or entering excavations.

Plan before you begin

Planning is essential to enable workers to work in and around an excavation safely. Some questions you could ask yourself are:

- Will this be notifiable work?
- Are there any underground services where you are working?
- How will you have safe access in and out of the excavation?
- How will you prevent a collapse?
- How will you protect members of the public from hazards caused by the excavation?
- Will the work affect nearby structures?
- Is there a risk of objects falling?
- Is there a risk of a gas pooling in the excavation?

When returning to an excavation workers should consider any changes. There are many reasons for changes such as weather, ground movement or tampering of the excavation. For example, heavy rain could cause the ground to be more prone to collapse; or overnight vandals may have tampered with the shoring.

Consider the legal requirements

As part of planning workers should consider legal requirements. There are many legal requirements to consider, for example:

- Has WorkSafe been notified of particular hazardous work?
- What Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) is needed?
- Is traffic management needed?

Are workers suitably qualified and/or supervised for the task?

Workers should be suitably qualified for the task and/or have the appropriate level of supervision. If workers are not suitably qualified or appropriately supervised, they can unwittingly take risks, which are a danger to themselves and others. For example, a person that is in their first few weeks of an apprenticeship may be too inexperienced to know when particular soils are likely to collapse.

Without the knowledge and experience of their supervisor, the apprentice could take an unnecessary risk and enter a trench that is has a high risk of collapsing.

Before work starts practitioners should stop for a few minutes to consider what must be done to work in and around excavations safely. Taking a few minutes to consider the job before work begins can help prevent unnecessary injury and/or property damage.

WorkSafe NZ has detailed Good Practice Guidelines for [Excavation Safety](#) that practitioners can refer to when carrying out excavations.