

Safety Alert

2 February 2024

Let's work together to keep ourselves and our workers safe.

Worker nearly buried alive in trench collapse

A drainage company was recently fined \$275,000 after a torrent of dirt fell into a trench two workers were digging.

One was operating a digger and the other was measuring inside the trench, which was three metres deep by two metres wide, when one of the side walls gave way. The worker inside the trench was engulfed, leaving only the top of his head visible. A fellow worker had to use his hands and a spade to dig his workmate free.

The victim suffered a broken rib cage, a collapsed lung, a broken sternum, and a broken collarbone. He now also lives with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) because of the incident.



You need to ensure that:

1. No matter how deep an excavation is, controls are in place to prevent ground collapse e.g. shoring, benching, or battering trenches.
2. All workers are trained and assessed as competent to carry out trenching activities safely.
3. A competent person frequently checks soil condition, the state of shoring, benching, battering, and excavated faces for signs of earth fretting, slipping, slumping, or ground swelling.

[MinEx statistics](#) on incidents with the potential to cause harm over the past 5 years show 16% of incidents (963 incidents) involve falls, of which 223 involved fall of ground.

Know of an incident or near miss? Please share the learnings with us.