

## **Cave-Ins: All It Takes Is a “Second”!**

**Every pipe layer needs to ask themselves how many times they have stepped out of the confines of the protective system for just a “minute”.** There are countless “reasons” given by workers everyday for doing just that. Have you caught yourself saying:

- *This tie in will only take a “minute”*
- *It will only take a “minute” for me to scramble up the side of the ditch because the ladder is back at the pipe van or yard.*

There are 2 very important things to remember with regard to the previous statements. Cave-ins do not happen in a “minute”, they happen in a second! No reason is any reason for a company to tell your family, coworkers and friends your life was needlessly lost in a cave-in.

### **Procedures to avoid being caught in a cave in:**

- Never step into an excavation without a protective system in place. This can take the form of sloping, benching, trench boxes, hydraulic shoring and so on. Some companies use a daily trench log and checklist for the foreman onsite that walks him through the steps of determining what is needed for the soil type. An example of this can be found on the NUCA of Indiana website at [www.nucaofindiana.com](http://www.nucaofindiana.com).
- Never leave the confines of a protective system. To leave the excavation, use a ladder secured to the box. If a ramp from the back of the box is used, it must be sloped to allow the individual to walk out in an upright position. For lateral tie ins and tight spots where a trench box can not be used there are several other shoring products on the market for these applications. It is an employer’s responsibility to provide these to their crews and the competent person’s responsibility to see that they are used. Talk to your company owners right away if you do not have the tools to complete your day to day job tasks safely.

### **Procedures to have in place in the event of a cave in:**

Have an Emergency Action Plan (EAP) in place. There are typically 4 to 5 individuals on a pipe laying crew. There is the pipe layer who is always in the excavation and 3-4 others on top.

- One of the top crew members must be designated as the person to make emergency phone calls. Too many times an accident occurs and no plan has been established as to who is responsible for what and valuable time is burned up.
- NEVER wait to call in emergency personnel. Cave ins can be tricky. Even if the person is not completely buried, call for help FIRST!!!!
- If the person can be seen, after or even while the phone call is being made, crew members can start trying to dig him out with shovels, NO HEAVY EQUIPMENT. If the crew is successful in uncovering him, you need medical help on site immediately. DO NOT THINK YOU CAN HANDLE THE PERSONS INJURIES. If you can not uncover, him the sooner the rescue team is on site the better!!!

- If you are working in a rural area where the job site can not be clearly recognized from the road, have another person designated to go to road to meet rescue personnel.
- Know who the person is that will deal with the media and family. Crew members should NEVER speak to the media. You are too close to that situation. There is a person within your company who is trained and equipped to handle media and family. Know who this person is and contact them AFTER the emergency phone call for rescue people has been made.