



Cause of Cave Ins

Cave ins in pits and ditches cause the death of construction workers every year. Most deaths have occurred in trenches dug for utility lines. However, soil slippage can occur anywhere soil is excavated. Landslides in clay soils kill more people each year than those in sandy soils.

Most workers are careful around sand because they know it moves easily. However, many believe a thick, tough clay soil will not slip. Yet, most clay soils shrink and crack open when dry and swell when wet. This shrinkage and swelling cause slick areas to develop beneath the surface.

Some clay soils contain water-tight layers called fragipans. Water accumulating on the impervious layer lubricates the soil, increasing the probability of slippage. When a ditch or pit is dug in a soil with a fragipan or in a soil with a high shrink-swell potential, the soil will often slip, resulting in a dangerous cave in. This becomes even more likely WHEN THE SOIL IS WET.

Prevention

Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) regulations require protective action on all worker-occupied excavations unless the cut is made in stable rock, or the cut is less than five feet deep and there is no potential for a cave in to occur. Protection can be accomplished with sloping and benching, support systems, or shield systems which conform to OSHA regulations.

Sloping the sides of the excavation is the simplest protection against a cave in. If soil properties in the excavation are unknown, the excavation slopes should be no steeper than 1-1/2 horizontal to 1 vertical. If the soil can be classified as a Type A or Type B material according to the OSHA classification system (see back side), you can use a steeper slope, as shown in Figures 1 through 5.

Consult OSHA regulations when more than one soil type is exposed in an excavated slope, or when benched slopes are used. The regulations also provide details on support and shield requirements. Complete requirements are found in OSHA's safety and health standards (29 CFR 1926, Subpart P).

Soils Information

Soil survey publications are available for most counties. This information is useful to engineers, builders, contractors and others interested in construction hazards. The publication identifies soils with fragipans and high shrink-swell potential. Other potential construction problems, such as water table, bedrock and corrosiveness, are also contained in the reports as well as information on engineering properties of soils.

Copies of soil survey reports and other soils information are available from the local office of the USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service, or write Soils, USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Suite 340, One Credit Union Place, Harrisburg, PA 17110-2993.

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February 1995

NRCS-PA-ENG-FS-01
(EPA Notice PA-17, 9/10/03)

OSHA Soils Classification for Excavated Slopes

Type A means cohesive soils with an unconfined compressive strength of 1.5 ton per square foot (tsf) or greater. Examples of cohesive soils are: clay, silty clay, sandy clay, clay loam and, in some cases, silty clay loam and sandy clay loam. Cemented soils such as hardpan are also considered Type A.

However, no soil is Type A if:

- (i) The soil is fissured; or
- (ii) The soil is subject to vibration from heavy traffic, pile driving, or similar effects; or
- (iii) The soil has been previously disturbed; or
- (iv) The soil is part of a sloped, layered system where the layers dip into the excavation on a slope of 4H:1V or greater; or
- (v) The material is subject to other factors that would require it to be classified as a less stable material.

Type B means:

- (i) Cohesive soil with an unconfined compressive strength greater than 0.5 tsf but less than 1.5 tsf; or
- (ii) Granular, cohesionless soils including: angular gravel (similar to crushed rock), silt, silt loam, sandy loam and, in some cases, silty clay loam and sandy clay loam; or
- (iii) Previously disturbed soils except those which would otherwise be classed as Type C soil; or
- (iv) Soil that meets the unconfined compressive strength or cementation requirements for Type A, but is fissured or subject to vibration; or
- (v) Dry rock that is not stable; or
- (vi) Material that is part of a sloped, layered system where the layers dip into the excavation on a slope less steep than 4H:1V, but only if the material would otherwise be classified as Type B.

Type C means:

- (i) Cohesive soil with an unconfined compressive strength of 0.5 tsf or less; or
- (ii) Granular soils including gravel, sand, and loamy sand; or
- (iii) Submerged soil or soil from which water is freely seeping; or
- (iv) Submerged rock that is not stable; or
- (v) Material in a sloped, layered system where the layers dip into the excavation on a slope of four 4H:1V or steeper.

MAXIMUM ALLOWABLE SLOPES

Figure 1. Type A Soil
Simple Slope, General



Figure 2. Type A Soil
Simple Slope, Short Term



Figure 3. Type A Soil
Unsupported, Vertically Sided Lower Portion, Maximum 8 Feet in Depth

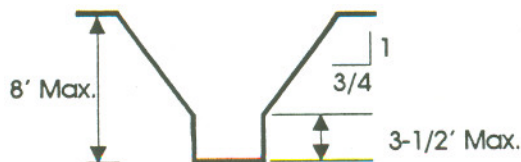


Figure 4. Type A Soil
Unsupported, Vertically Sided Lower Portion, Maximum 12 Feet

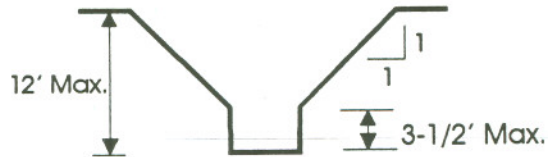


Figure 5. Type B Soil
Simple Slope



Figure 6. Type C Soil
Simple Slope

