

Standard Interpretations

06/24/2002 - Clarification concerning fall protection and vertical walled trenches with depth of 6 feet or greater and use of controlled access zones.

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• **Standard Number:** [1926.501\(b\)\(7\)](#); [1926.501\(b\)\(7\)\(i\)](#); [1926.501\(b\)\(7\)\(ii\)](#); [1926.501\(b\)\(2\)](#); [1926.501\(b\)\(9\)](#); [1926.502\(k\)](#); [1926.651\(f\)](#)

OSHA requirements are set by statute, standards and regulations. Our interpretation letters explain these requirements and how they apply to particular circumstances, but they cannot create additional employer obligations. This letter constitutes OSHA's interpretation of the requirements discussed. Note that our enforcement guidance may be affected by changes to OSHA rules. Also, from time to time we update our guidance in response to new information. To keep apprised of such developments, you can consult OSHA's website at <http://www.osha.gov>.

June 24, 2002

Ned McDougald
4170 W. Menlo
Fresno, CA 93722

Dear Mr. McDougald:

This is in response to your letter of April 22, 2002, requesting an interpretation of fall protection requirements when working around trenches. Specifically, you ask if fall protection is required around vertical walled trenches that have a depth 6 feet or greater; if there are any exceptions to fall protection around trenches implied or stated; and whether a controlled access zone be used in lieu of fall protection.

29 CFR 1926.501(b)(7) provides:

(i) Each employee at the edge of an excavation 6 feet (1.8m) or more in depth shall be protected from falling by guardrail systems, fences, or barricades when the excavations are not readily seen because of plant growth or other visual barrier;¹

(ii) Each employee at the edge of a well, pit, shaft, and similar excavation 6 feet (1.8m) or more in depth shall be protected from falling by guardrail systems, fences, barricades, or covers.

Under these provisions, if the trench is not readily visible because of plant growth or other visual barrier, fall protection is required.² Thus, unless the trench you are describing is obscured from view, there is no requirement for fall protection to be provided.

When fall protection is required around trenches, a controlled access zone is not an acceptable means of providing fall protection. Controlled access zones may only be used where employees are performing overhand bricklaying and related work; or as part of a fall

protection plan for leading edge work, precast concrete erection or residential construction. See §1926.501(b)(2) (leading edge work); (b)(9) (overhand bricklaying and related work); §1926.502(k) (fall protection plan option); compliance directive CPL 3-0.1A (residential construction); Appendix E (precast erection plan).

If you need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact us by fax at: U.S. Department of Labor, OSHA, Directorate of Construction, Office of Construction Standards and Compliance Assistance, fax # 202-693-1689. You can also contact us by mail at the above office, Room N3468, 200 Constitution Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20210, although there will be a delay in our receiving correspondence by mail.

Sincerely,

Russell B. Swanson, Director
Directorate of Construction