

Purpose: Provide safe techniques for staff to follow and avoid strains and sprains, heat stress and sun burn while manually digging.

Background: Manually digging and trenching can be physically demanding work, made even more dangerous when proper techniques are not used. Potential hazards include:

- Muscle strain when attempting to lift too much dirt at one time
- Overexertion and muscle pain caused by digging for extended periods of time without breaks
- Taking an awkward position while digging, such as twisting the back or knee

Techniques to Dig Safely:

1. Never dig while work is being performed overhead
2. Whenever possible, use mechanical devices to assist with digging
3. Rather than twisting at the torso, move your feet and turn your entire body when digging or moving dirt
4. Use tools with long handles to prevent excessive bending of the torso
5. Round bladed shovels should be used for sand and dry earth
6. Square bladed shovels should be used for coarse material
7. Use shovels with a rolled step for digging in hard earth
8. Use smaller blade width trenching shovels to minimize the weight of materials lifted
9. Break jobs into smaller tasks no longer than 15 minutes in length, alternating with non-digging tasks
10. Alternate between shoveling on the left and then the right side of the body
11. Reduce throwing distance as much as possible—ideally, throw distance should be between 3 and 4 feet

Always wear proper PPE:

- High-cut safety footwear with toe caps and reinforced, non-skid soles
- Sturdy, well-fitting gloves with grip
- Lightweight long pants (vs. shorts) and long-sleeved shirts to help protect against both UV, and ticks or other insects
- Brimmed hat to protect head neck and face from sun's ultraviolet rays
- Use appropriate eye protection (safety goggles) whenever dust or debris may get into your eyes
- Protect yourself from the sun - use sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or higher and re-apply sunscreen per instructions on container throughout the day