NEW BRUNSWICK EXCAVATION

Trench Safety

WorkSafeNB trench and excavation rules and staying safe around an open dig

4 Expert Answers from Dig IQ

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Q1

Trench next to my Moncton house after rain, is it unstable?

Stay out of the trench and back from the edge until the contractor has assessed it.

Whether a trench is stable after rain is not something to judge by looking at it from the top.

What WorkSafeNB's rules say

WorkSafeNB's General Regulation 91-191 requires that any trench 1.2 m (about 4 ft) or deeper that workers need to enter must have walls that are shored, sloped or benched, or cut in solid rock, and any shoring must be certified as adequate by an engineer. Excavated material must be kept at least 1.2 m from the edge. The trench must be kept reasonably free of water. These rules bind the employer, meaning the excavation contractor, not you. But they tell you exactly what to ask when you call the contractor back to site: has the trench been assessed since the rain, is the water out, and is the wall condition still what it was when work stopped?

If water is pooling in the bottom or seeping through the face, the contractor needs to deal with that before anyone goes back in. Ask the contractor directly whether the walls need to be re-evaluated and whether an engineer needs to look at the shoring before work resumes.

On the permit side, the City of Moncton requires a building and development permit for new construction. Regulation 2021-2 under the Building Code Administration Act requires at least one inspection of the footings and foundation before any backfilling begins. If this trench is part of a foundation dig, backfilling cannot start until that inspection is done. Ask the City of Moncton's building department how to book it, and make sure the contractor knows the inspection has to happen before any backfilling.

Before any digging started, the contractor should have requested locates from Info-Excavation, with at least three working days' notice, and separately from NB Power, with at least five business days' notice. NB Power's locate covers only NB Power-owned underground power lines and is valid for 60 days from the date on the locate form. Ask the contractor to show you both locate tickets. Any private lines, such as wiring to a garage or an old drain, are yours to find and mark.

When you are comparing two written quotes for this job, set them side by side and check whether each one spells out how rock is priced if it is encountered, what trucking distance is assumed for spoil removal, when backfill happens relative to the foundation inspection, and what site clean-up is included at the end.

The form on this page can send your job details to excavation contractors listed in the New Brunswick Construction Network directory.

Q2

Shoring versus a trench box on a Saint John sewer job?

Shoring, Trench Boxes and Saint John Sewer Work

For a sewer trench in Saint John, the choice between timber shoring and a trench box comes down to the same WorkSafeNB rule either way: any trench 1.2 m (about 4 ft) or deeper that workers enter must be shored, sloped or benched, or cut in solid rock, and any shoring or bracing must be certified as adequate by an engineer. The regulation names shoring, bracing or caging and does not pick one method over another.

Which method suits a Saint John sewer job is the contractor's and engineer's call, and the engineer's certification applies to whichever is used. If the trench is sloped or benched to within 1.2 m of the bottom at no more than 1 m of vertical rise for each 1 m of horizontal run, shoring is not required, but that geometry has to be judged on site against the available space and the soil conditions the contractor finds when they open the ground.

For a sewer connection in Saint John, the City requires a Water and Sewerage Permit Package before any new, renewal or repair installation on water, sanitary or storm sewer lines. Ask the City's permit office what that package requires for your specific connection before the machine arrives. Before any digging, the contractor must determine the location of underground utilities under WorkSafeNB's General Regulation 91-191, section 180. That means two separate requests: one through Info-Excavation (Click Before You Dig) at least three working days ahead, and a separate request to NB Power at least five business days ahead, because NB Power runs its own locate service and checks only for NB Power-owned underground power lines. Any private lines, fuel lines or drains installed by a past owner are the owner's to find and mark before the machine moves.

Stay back from the open trench edge. WorkSafeNB rules require excavated material to be kept at least 1.2 m from the edge, a ladder extending at least 1 m above the top within 15 m of any worker in the trench, and a worker on the surface who can see anyone working below. Those rules bind the employer, meaning the excavation contractor, but as the property owner you can ask to see how the contractor plans to meet them before work starts.

A fair quote for this job should spell out how the trench will be protected, who certifies the shoring or box as adequate, how rock will be priced if it is encountered, where spoil goes and at what cost, and whether the City permit fee is included or billed separately. Ask for a WorkSafeNB clearance certificate before signing, and retain 10% of the contract price as a holdback for 60 days after substantial performance, as required by the Construction Remedies Act.

Ask the contractor to name the engineer who will certify the trench protection method and confirm that certification is in writing before anyone enters the trench.

If you are ready to get quotes, the request form on this site sends your job details to local New Brunswick excavation contractors who can respond directly.

Q3

Should kids be kept away from an open foundation hole in Riverview?

Yes, keep children and anyone who does not need to be there well back from an open foundation hole.

Keep the Site Secure

WorkSafeNB's General Regulation 91-191 sets trench and excavation rules that bind the employer on site. Section 183 requires excavated material to be kept at least 1.2 m from the edge of the cut, and section 188 requires lights, warnings and barriers where traffic is a hazard. Ask the contractor how the site will be secured when the crew is not there.

WorkSafeNB rules also say nobody enters an excavation 1.2 m (about 4 ft) or deeper unless the walls are supported, sloped or cut in solid rock, and a safe means of exit is within reach. That rule is written for workers, but it tells you something plain about what an open hole can do.

Practical steps while the dig is open: fence or barrier the perimeter, keep the gate or barrier closed when the crew is off site, and make sure children understand the area is off limits. Whether a fence is required by local by-law is worth confirming with Plan 360, the Southeast Regional Service Commission that handles building and development permits in Riverview.

On the permit side, Regulation 2021-2 under the Building Code Administration Act requires at least one inspection of the footings and foundation before any backfilling begins. Ask Plan 360 how that inspection is booked. Backfilling cannot happen until it is done, so the barrier needs to stay in place until then.

Before the machine arrived, the contractor should have requested locates from Info-Excavation, with at least three working days notice, and separately from NB Power, with at least five business days notice. NB Power's locate covers only NB Power-owned underground lines and is valid for 60 days from the date on the locate form. Private lines, such as wiring run to a garage or shed, are the owner's to find and mark. Ask the contractor to show both locate tickets if you have not seen them.

When you review the quote for this job, ask the contractor exactly how rock removal is priced, how far the spoil is being hauled, and whether backfill material is included or billed separately, because those three items are where the final number can climb past the original figure.

Q4

How far back should the dirt pile be from a trench in Fredericton?

WorkSafeNB's General Regulation 91-191 sets the rule: excavated material must be kept at least 1.2 metres from the edge of the trench. That applies on any job site in Fredericton where an employer is doing the work.

The 1.2 metre setback is a minimum. If the trench is 1.2 metres deep or more and workers need to enter it, WorkSafeNB rules also require the walls to be shored, sloped or benched, or cut in solid rock, and any shoring must be engineer-certified. Section 183 adds a further rule for rock excavations deeper than 1.8 metres.

Stay back from the edge yourself. WorkSafeNB rules are written for employers and their workers, but the trench edge is not a safe place for anyone to stand, regardless of depth.

On a Fredericton job there are a few other things worth having in order before the machine starts. Info-Excavation, reached through Click Before You Dig, needs at least three working days notice; the locate is valid until the end date written on the request. NB Power runs its own separate underground locate service and asks for at least five business days notice; that locate is valid for 60 days from the date on the form and covers only NB Power-owned lines. Private lines, such as wiring run to a garage or shed, are the property owner's to find and mark. If the trench is within 30 metres of a watercourse or wetland, a Watercourse and Wetland Alteration permit from the province is required before any ground disturbance. If the work involves a new building or addition, Regulation 2021-2 under the Building Code Administration Act requires a footing and foundation inspection through the City of Fredericton's building department before any backfilling begins.

Ask the contractor for a WorkSafeNB clearance certificate before work starts, confirm the locate records are in hand, and under the Construction Remedies Act hold back 10 percent of the contract price for 60 days after substantial performance.

When the job is done, keep the locate records, any permit and inspection sign-off, and the written quote and invoice together in one place, because you may need them if a question comes up about the work years later.

Disclaimer: This guide is provided for informational purposes only by New Brunswick Excavation. It does not constitute professional advice. Always book your locates, check with your municipality or Regional Service Commission, and follow WorkSafeNB rules before starting any excavation project. Information is current as of November 15, 2026 and may change. Visit **newbrunswickexcavation.com** for the latest answers.