What should you do before shoveling or digging?

- Contact utility companies for location of cables, wires, and pipes prior to digging. In many areas it is illegal to dig before you call to have these utilities located.
- Wear the proper protective clothing (e.g., safety footwear, gloves, long pants, etc.) that is suitable for the task and the work environment.
- Choose the proper tool for the task and make sure it is in good condition.
- Remember that wet soil is heavy - adjust the amount of soil you put on your shovel accordingly.
- Keep your feet shoulder-width apart to stay balanced and not slip.
- Don't twist your body - turn your front foot in the direction you want to deposit the shovel's load.
- Keep a loaded shovel close to your body to keep you balanced.

What should I know about cave-ins?

One cubic foot of soil can weigh over 100 pounds - a small amount of soil falling into an unprotected trench can injure or kill you. Workers have been killed after being buried up to their waist from the pressure exerted on their body.

Determine if you have to take precautions against the possibility of a cave-in. Precautions could include:

- sloping the bank to prevent a cave-in;
- shoring the banks with plywood, timber, or other materials to support the sides of a trench;
- installing shields or trench boxes; or
- benching or making steps in the sides of the excavation.

The protective measures that you have to take will depend on various factors like the size and depth of the excavation, and

- the kind of soil (for example, clay can break off in large chunks without warning);
- if the soil has been recently excavated (soil that is "loose" may cave in more readily);
- the water content of the soil; and
- weather conditions (e.g., rainy, freezing temperatures).

The precautions you take will be different if you will be working in the hole rather than standing on firm, stable ground at the top of the hole (e.g., post hole, hole for planting a shrub).
Snakes are found in many parts of California and may pose a hazard for those who work outdoors. Although snakes generally avoid humans or animals, they can attack, particularly if they're surprised or are protecting their young or territory. Some snakes are considered “harmless,” but others release a poisonous venom when they bite. If you'll be working or walking where snakes are found, be aware of their habits, dress for protection, and know what to do or not to do if you encounter or are bitten by a snake.

Poisonous snakes commonly found in California are rattlesnakes. A bite from one of these snakes should always be considered a medical emergency. Although deaths from snakebites are relatively rare, people who are bitten can't always positively identify the snake, so should get prompt medical care. Even a bite from a so-called “harmless” snake can cause an infection or allergic reaction in some people.

The key to avoiding snakebites is understanding their habits and staying alert. Snake seasons are spring, summer, and early fall. They're usually found where food (rodents), water, and protection are available such as abandoned structures, irrigation ditches, water holes, and in rock piles. They like places that offer both a place to sun and a place to hide. At night when it's cool, snakes become active hunting their prey.

If you'll be working or walking in snake infested areas, wear protective clothing such as long pants, leather boots, and gloves. Be aware of your surroundings. Be cautious in tall grass and watch where you step. Walk in areas where the ground is clear so you can see where you step. Watch where you put your hands. Don't reach blindly into rock cracks, wood piles, animal burrows or under bushes. And when you sit, look first, especially in shady areas.

Most snakebites happen when a snake is accidentally stepped on, handled or harassed. Many people are bitten because they try to get a closer look or try to kill it. So, leave snakes alone ! If you encounter a snake, stay calm and freeze in place. The snake will often move away. If it doesn't move then you should slowly walk around it, keeping as far away as possible. Usually snakes are not aggressive and will not “chase” a person. They'd rather escape from noise and commotion or remain quiet and hidden.

The symptoms of a poisonous snake bite vary depending on the snake's size and species, the amount of poison in its venom, the bite's location, and the victim's age and underlying medical problems. Specific treatment for a snake bite should be left to the emergency medical personnel. Most medical professionals recommend against incisions in the wound, tourniquets, ice or any other type of cooling on the bite and against electric shock. However, if someone is bitten, the American Red Cross suggests a few basic first-aid steps:

- Keep the victim calm and still.
- Have the victim lie down, with the affected limb immobilized and placed lower than the heart.
- Remove rings, bracelets, boots or other restricting items from the bitten extremity.
- Get medical care. Responding quickly is crucial.
Use common sense when you're in areas where there may be snakes. Keep in mind that an unprovoked snake doesn't want trouble any more than you do. Caution and respect are your best weapons against snake bites.