

## Standard Interpretations

### 05/11/2004 - Evaluation of the use of aluminum forms as an exit route from trench excavations.

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• **Standard Number:** [1926.651](#); [1926.651\(c\)\(2\)](#)

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>.

May 11, 2004

Charles O. Engelken  
Wall-Ties & Forms, Inc.  
4000 Bonner Industrial Drive  
Shawnee, Kansas 66226

Re: Use of aluminum forms as a means of egress [exit route] from trench excavations.

Dear Mr. Engelken:

This is in response to your June 16, 2003, letter to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) in which you asked whether using aluminum forms to climb out of trench excavations is considered an "other safe means of egress" under 29 CFR 1926.651(c)(2). Unfortunately, your letter was not forwarded from OSHA's Regional Office to us until December 24, 2003; we apologize for the delay in responding.

We have paraphrased your question below:

**Question:** Our residential construction workers are using aluminum forms as an alternative means of egress from trench excavations. Does this method of egress meet OSHA's requirements under §1926.651(c)(2)?

**Answer:**

No. Section 1926.651(c)(2) states:

(c) *Access and egress--*  
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(2) Means of egress from trench excavations. A stairway, ladder, ramp or other safe means of egress shall be located in trench excavations that are 4 feet (1.22 m) or more in depth so as to require no more than 25 feet (7.62 m) of lateral travel for employees.

The photographs included in your letter indicate that workers are using aluminum forms as a means of egress from trench excavations in two different manners. In the first method, the

workers lean the form against the sloped side of the trench and climb up the stiffeners and step out onto the bank. In the second, the workers ascend an assembled (vertical) form, place one foot on the opposite side of the trench (the bank), and then subsequently step across with the other foot; these are pictured below:



Both manners of using aluminum forms as a means of egress fail to meet the intent of the standard. The preamble to Subpart P (Excavations) states that "[T]his requirement [29 CFR 1926.651(c)(2)] is intended to provide employees working down in a trench with a safe means of escape in case of an emergency." (54 *FR* 45918, October 31, 1989.)

The photographs indicate that the stiffener only provides space for the tip of a worker's boot. This insufficient tread depth enhances the potential for tripping, slipping, or falling while trying to climb out of the trench in an emergency.

A slipping, tripping, or falling risk is further compounded by the worker having to step from a vertical form across to the bank. The photographs illustrate the worker precariously stepping onto the bank while straddling the trench. In particular, in a time of emergency (for example, a cave-in), the use of a form in this manner would not provide a safe means of egress as required by §1926.651(c)(2), which contemplates a means of egress that permits a quick and easy means of escape in case of an emergency.

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 Guidance, 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