

Sinkholes



Sinkhole beneath railroad yard south of Birmingham, Alabama, 2000

In Alabama, the most common causes of land subsidence are the development of sinkholes in areas underlain by soluble carbonate rocks or ground collapse above abandoned mines. Abandoned coal mines create a hazard in terms of foundation safety because of their widespread occurrence in parts of the state underlain by coal beds of the Pottsville Formation, their often shallow depth, and the progressive deterioration of remaining supports and overburden. [Click here to view a short video about Living with Sinkholes.](#) (This video requires a free RealPlayer for viewing. [Click here to download RealPlayer](#)).



Many areas of the state, particularly north Alabama, are underlain by carbonate rocks that are susceptible to solution and the development of subsurface cavities in bedrock. Periods of drought, excessive rainfall, well pumpage, and construction activities increase the potential for sinkhole formation in these areas.

A large sinkhole (below) developed near Calera in Shelby County in a matter of seconds in December 1972. The sink is about 300 feet in diameter and 100 feet deep. This sinkhole occurred during a drought when the water table was much lower than normal.



(Photo by Tom Stone)

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