

Confined Space Can be Deadly

WHAT'S AT STAKE?

A confined space can be a street manhole or a country silo. Your safety is in peril if you enter any space where you are not positive that you can exit safely.

WHAT'S THE DANGER?

Confined spaces are dangerous for many reasons. They may be poorly ventilated, causing an accumulation of toxic gases or hazardous airborne substances, or a lack of oxygen.

There may be moving equipment, slippery or dangerous surfaces, electric shock hazards, falling objects, water or other liquid contents, chemicals or extreme temperatures. Noise, poor visibility or shifting materials such as grain or sand could be present.

Atmospheric hazards cause most deaths in confined spaces. Instead of using test equipment, people think they can rely on their sight, taste and smell to detect toxic atmospheres.

The air in confined spaces can present respiratory difficulties and other physical distress. When there is too little oxygen in a confined space, a person can smother. Toxic gases, dusts and fumes can cause injury or death when inhaled or contacted by the skin.

Fire and explosion are other dangers that may be present in confined space atmospheres. These could be ignited when a space is ventilated with oxygen instead of air. Flammable gases, dusts or vapors can also be set off by a spark.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

You should never enter a confined space without training. Written procedures and an entry permit system are essential. Here are some

of the guidelines likely to be included:

- Take atmospheric precautions. The atmosphere should be tested before you enter – by trained people using the right equipment. The confined space should be ventilated until it tests safe, and possibly afterwards. If this is not possible, the right respiratory protection should be worn
- Lock out energy sources. Lines carrying gases, liquids or solids should be disconnected or blocked off before you enter. Valves and electrical circuits should be locked out and tagged.
- Remove possible sources of ignition. Use non-sparking tools and lighting devices in a potentially flammable atmosphere.
- Be fully prepared before entry. Make sure you are wearing the required personal protective equipment (PPE) including a hardhat, safety-toed footwear, gloves and your breathing apparatus
- Wear a lifeline. The lifeline should be connected from your body harness to a winch outside the confined entrance so you can be pulled out in case of emergency.
- Have trained and equipped personnel standing by outside the confined space, for communication and rescue if necessary.

FINAL WORD

Make sure you are fully trained in confined space procedures for your workplace.

Take all the sight precautions before entering a confined space, even in an emergency.