Confined Space Entry – No Permit Required for Municipalities Meeting Kit

WHAT'S AT STAKE

While some confined spaces may be classified as "permit-required" by OSHA and other regulatory agencies, there are many confined spaces that do not meet the criteria for a permit-required confined space. However, even if a confined space is not considered "permit-required," there may still be hazards associated with the space that require special precautions.

WHAT'S THE DANGERHAZARDS OF NO PERMIT REQUIREMENTS FOR MUNICIPALITIES

OSHA defines a confined space as a space that is large enough and configured in such a way that an employee can enter and perform work, has limited or restricted means of entry or exit, and is not designed for continuous occupancy. Examples of confined spaces include tanks, vessels, silos, storage bins, hoppers, vaults, and pits.

A confined space that does not contain a hazardous atmosphere or the potential for engulfment may still have limited access and egress, making it difficult to rescue a worker in the event of an emergency. In addition, confined spaces may contain physical hazards, such as sharp edges or protrusions, that can cause injury to workers.

SPECIFIC WORKER HAZARDS – MUNICIPALITIES

The specific hazards can vary depending on the type of confined space and the materials or equipment inside. Common hazards associated with confined spaces that municipalities should be aware of, include:

- **Hazardous atmospheres:** Confined spaces can contain hazardous atmospheres that can be deadly to workers. These can include oxygen-deficient or oxygen-enriched environments, as well as atmospheres containing toxic gases, vapors, or dust.
- **Engulfment:** Workers in confined spaces can be at risk of being engulfed by materials such as water, soil, or grain. Engulfment can be fatal if the worker is unable to escape.
- **Entrapment:** Workers can become trapped in confined spaces by equipment, machinery, or other materials. Entrapment can prevent the worker from escaping or being rescued in a timely manner.
- **Fire and explosion:** Confined spaces can pose a risk of fire or explosion if flammable or combustible materials are present.
- **Physical hazards:** Confined spaces can also pose physical hazards such as falls, electrocution, or being struck by moving objects.
- **Lack of Oxygen:** Confined spaces can be poorly ventilated, and if the space is not properly ventilated, it can cause a lack of oxygen. Workers can become unconscious or suffocate if the oxygen level in the confined space is too low.
- **Toxic Atmosphere:** Confined spaces can contain toxic gases, vapors, or fumes. Workers can suffer from health problems or even die if they are exposed to these toxic substances.
- **Psychological Stress:** Confined spaces can be stressful environments, and workers may experience anxiety, claustrophobia, or other psychological stressors that can impair their ability to work safely.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

BEST WORKER PROTECTION – PERMIT OR NOT PERMIT REQUIREMENTS

Municipalities may be exempt from certain confined space entry requirements, such as permit requirements, if they are performing work within their own facilities or property. However, it is important to note that even if a permit is not required, safety precautions and best practices should still be followed to ensure the safety of workers.

OSHA requires that employers, including municipalities, develop a written permit-required confined space program that includes procedures for identifying and evaluating confined spaces, developing and implementing a permit system, providing training to employees, and ensuring that rescue services are available in case of an emergency.

Municipalities are required to obtain permits for entering confined spaces, just like any other employer in the USA.

BOTTOM LINE – WORKER SAFETY ENTERING CONFINED SPACES

It is important for municipalities to prioritize safety and take appropriate measures to protect workers who are entering confined spaces. Failure to do so can result in serious injuries or fatalities.

Municipalities may have workers who enter confined spaces as part of their job duties, such as for maintenance or repair of water or sewer lines, or for inspecting storm drains or other infrastructure. Confined spaces are defined by OSHA as spaces that:

- Are large enough for workers to enter and perform work
- Have limited or restricted means of entry or exit
- Are not designed for continuous occupancy

BEST SAFETY PRACTICES REGARFLESS OF PERMIT REQUIREMENTS

Preventing the need to enter confined spaces is the most effective way for municipalities to protect their workers from the risks and dangers associated with these spaces. Here are some ways that municipalities can prevent the need for entry into confined spaces:

1. Identify all confined spaces in the workplace and conducting a hazard assessment to determine which spaces are permit-required.
2. Developed and implementing a written program for permit-required confined spaces, including procedures for identifying and evaluating hazards, ensuring proper

ventilation and air quality, and providing appropriate personal protective equipment.
3. Provide appropriate training to employees who will enter permit-required confined spaces, including training on the hazards associated with confined spaces, the use of personal protective equipment, and emergency procedures.
4. Establish procedures for ensuring the safety of workers during entry and rescue operations, including assigning a competent person to oversee the entry and rescue operations.

FINAL WORD

It’s important to note that even if a permit is not required by law, it is still important for municipalities and other organizations to take steps to ensure the safety of workers entering confined spaces. This may include conducting hazard assessments, providing appropriate training, and implementing safety protocols to minimize risks.