



SAFETY UNLIMITED, INC.

Weekly Safety Meeting

Safe Confined Space Entry

Confined spaces present a special type of danger – a danger that you may not recognize until you've already entered a confined space and encountered the hazard. By then, it may be too late. Toxic gases, lack of oxygen, shifting materials inside, and other hazards can cause injury or death before you can take action to protect yourself or a co-worker. That's why it's so important for you to look before you leap. You must be aware of the confined spaces around you and know how to enter and exit them safely.

Every day, employees enter confined spaces to perform a job. Unfortunately, they don't all come out alive. Each year 10,000 workers are injured and more than 50 die. Some succumb to lack of oxygen, an explosion, or toxic gases. Others are engulfed by loose materials in the space or killed by the unexpected start-up of machinery.

Historically, 60% of these fatalities are would-be rescuers who enter these spaces in an attempt to retrieve the fallen individual or individuals, only to be overcome and become victims themselves.

To put this another way, for every person who dies in a confined space, two more people die trying to save that person. Every year unsuspecting employees are killed as a result of hazardous conditions in confined spaces.

Confined Space Hazards:

- Lack of oxygen, presenting a suffocation hazard;
- Fire or explosion hazards from an accumulation of flammable vapors;
- Health hazards from toxic vapors;
- Difficulty exiting the space in the event of an emergency;
- Cramped spaces to work in, resulting in a danger of being caught in equipment;
- Poor visibility;
- High levels of noise; and
- Temperature extremes.

OSHA requires workplaces to have a plan for working safely in confined spaces. If you work in a confined space, you should know your company's procedures for safely entering into the space and working in it. Confined spaces should be identified and classified, and safe entry procedures developed.

All confined spaces are categorized into two main groups: non-permit and permit-required. Permit-required confined spaces must have signs posted outside stating that entry requires a permit.

Permit-required Confined Space Hazards:

- Have the potential to contain a hazardous atmosphere;
- Could contain material capable of engulfing someone entering the space;
- Have an internal configuration such that a person could be trapped or asphyxiated by inwardly converging walls or by a floor that slopes downward and tapers off to a smaller cross section (e.g., a grain silo); and
- Contain any other recognized serious safety or health hazard.

Things You Should Be Aware of Before You Enter a Confined Space:

- Know how to enter it safely.
- Know how to exit quickly.
- Know that the atmosphere in the space is tested and found to be free of dangerous levels of toxic or flammable vapors, and that there is sufficient oxygen.
- Know that the atmosphere within the space is going to remain safe while you are working.
- Know the rescue plan in the event of an emergency, and make sure the proper rescue equipment is available and in good condition.
- Know that another person outside the confined space is keeping an eye on you as you work and that he or she knows the rescue plan too.

Another very important thing to remember is what to do if someone working in a confined space becomes ill or injured.

In the event of such an emergency, you should never enter a confined space to rescue someone without the proper equipment, training, and atmospheric testing. Chances are whatever caused the illness or injury will claim you as a victim too.

Summary:

It is possible to work safely in a confined space, but it's a task that requires careful planning and preparation. Don't be tempted to take shortcuts when it comes to confined spaces. Follow all safety precautions and don't hesitate to speak up if you are unsure of the correct procedures. You play the most important role of all when it comes to working safely. By consistently following safe work procedures and not taking chances, you will be working safely for a long time to come.

AN UNPLANNED RESCUE WILL PROBABLY BE YOUR LAST!!

