

Confined spaces in general industry

Does your workplace contain areas that are considered to be “confined spaces?”

Unfortunately, we don’t always recognize confined spaces. The result could be severe injuries, illnesses and even death.

What is a confined space?

Confined spaces are not necessarily designed for people, but are large enough for workers to enter and perform certain job tasks.

Confined spaces:

- Have a limited opening for entry or exit
- Are large enough to enter and work
- Are not designed for continuous occupancy
- Can include but not be limited to: below ground level spaces and pits, vaults, tanks, storage bins, manholes, silos, underground vaults and pipeline

OSHA uses the term “**permit-required confined space**” to describe a confined space that has one or more of the following characteristics:

- May contain a hazardous or potentially hazardous atmosphere
- May contain material that has the potential to engulf an entrant
- May contain walls that converge inward or floors that slope downward and taper into a smaller area which could trap or asphyxiate an entrant
- May contain other serious physical hazards such as unguarded machinery or exposed live wires
- May contain other serious health hazards, such as heat stress

How should you approach a confined space?

- Identify confined spaces and inform exposed employees of the existence and location of such spaces and their hazards
- Establish Confined Space Entry procedures and review with employees
- Confirm that employees understand and follow established procedures before entering permit-required confined spaces
- Do not allow employees to enter permit-required confined spaces without being trained and without having a permit to enter
- Verify that employee knows how and when to exit
- Before entry, identify any physical hazards
- Before and during entry, test and monitor for oxygen content, flammability, toxicity or explosive hazards as necessary
- Use fall protection, rescue, air-monitoring, ventilation, lighting and communication equipment according to entry procedures
- Employee should maintain contact at all times with a trained attendant either visually, via phone, or by two-way radio

Following this monitoring system enables the attendant and entry supervisor to order an employee to evacuate and to alert appropriately trained rescue personnel to rescue entrants when needed.

Reference:

OSHA General Industry Standard 29 CFR 1910.146. Confined Space

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Safety Requirements for Entering Confined Spaces

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