

TOOLBOX TALK NO.9

Confined Spaces



Every entry into a confined space is potentially hazardous.

Accidents in confined spaces are a major source of death at work, killing several people each year in a wide range of industries.

Some confined spaces are easy to identify (such as closed tanks, vessels and sewers) however others are less obvious, but may be equally dangerous, including basement level boiler rooms, open-topped tanks, vats, silos and other structures that may become confined spaces during their manufacture.

Accidents in confined spaces are caused by a combination of factors arising from a lack of awareness, inadequate supervision and a lack of training.

The air that we breathe contains around 21% oxygen and, at that level, people can work without difficulty. A falling level of oxygen will create an increasingly dangerous situation if breathing apparatus is not worn. At 6% oxygen, respiration stops and death will follow within minutes.

Monitoring and testing must establish that the confined space is safe to enter

Adequate and effective communications must exist between those inside and those outside the confined space.

Prior to entry into a confined space, everyone must be aware of the dangers that exist. There will be a need for a safe system of work and the procedures in order to carry out the work safely.

Any person entering a confined space must be trained. The extent of training needed will vary according to the circumstances. Entry may only proceed if it is in accordance with a proper safe system of work (permit to work).

Entry into a confined space must not be made unless a special gas monitor is present to monitor gases in the space. If a danger, exists, an alarm will sound.

CARE MUST BE TAKEN TO SELECT THE CORRECT TYPE OF PROTECTION FOR THE CONDITIONS.

RESCUE

- The arrangements for the rescue of persons in the event of an emergency, both in terms of trained persons and equipment, need to be suitable and sufficient. The arrangements must be in place before any person enters or works in a confined space.
- Proper and effective rescue training is quite hard and arduous and is not to be undertaken lightly. Persons selected for such training need to be physically fit and able to adapt to situations as they arise during a rescue.

All tools must be non-sparking and all lighting and electrical equipment must carry British Approvals Service for Electrical Equipment in Flammable Atmospheres approval.

Smoking and naked lights are strictly prohibited and care must be taken to avoid the generation of static electricity with the consequent risk of sparks.

NO PERSON SHOULD ENTER A CONFINED SPACE UNLESS THEY ARE TRAINED AND COMPETENT TO DO SO SAFELY.

Questions:

What hazards may be found in confined spaces?

What spaces could be classed as confined spaces?

Who should carry out an assessment of the confined space before entry?

