

TOOLBOX TALK

Confined Space Entry

WHY THIS MATTERS

Confined spaces kill an average of 92 workers every year. Toxic atmospheres, oxygen deficiency, engulfment, and entrapment make these among the most dangerous work environments. Over 60% of confined space deaths are would-be rescuers who entered unprepared.

92

Average confined space deaths per year

60%

Of deaths are would-be rescuers

100%

Confined space deaths are preventable

5 Critical Steps Before Entering Any Confined Space

No shortcuts — every step is mandatory, every entry, every time:

1

OBTAIN A VALID ENTRY PERMIT

No entry without a signed permit. Verify hazards identified, controls in place, and rescue plan ready.

2

TEST THE ATMOSPHERE

Use a calibrated 4-gas meter. Test for O₂ (19.5-23.5%), LEL (<10%), H₂S, and CO before and during entry.

3

VENTILATE CONTINUOUSLY

Mechanical ventilation must run before and throughout the entire entry. Never rely on natural airflow.

4

ASSIGN AN ATTENDANT

A trained attendant must be stationed outside at ALL times. They never enter — they summon rescue.

5

HAVE RESCUE EQUIPMENT READY

Retrieval system, tripod, harness, and communication device must be set up BEFORE entry begins.

Before Entry — Critical Checklist

- Is the entry permit signed and posted at the entry point?
- Has atmospheric testing been completed with acceptable readings?
- Is continuous mechanical ventilation running?
- Is a trained attendant stationed at the opening?
- Is rescue equipment set up and the rescue team on standby?

Confined Space Hazards — Know What Can Kill You

Toxic atmosphere: H2S, CO, methane, solvent vapors. Odorless gases kill without warning. Always test first.

Oxygen deficiency: Below 19.5% O2 causes impaired judgment, unconsciousness, and death within minutes.

Oxygen enrichment: Above 23.5% O2 makes materials highly flammable. Sparks cause flash fires and explosions.

Engulfment: Grain, sand, water, or loose materials can bury a worker in seconds. No time to react.

Entrapment: Converging walls, sloping floors, or inward narrowing spaces can trap workers permanently.

Energy sources: Moving parts, electrical, hydraulic, thermal, or chemical energy. Full LOTO required before entry.

Common Mistakes That Kill

- ✗ Entering without testing the atmosphere — you cannot smell, see, or taste most toxic gases
- ✗ Rushing in to rescue a fallen worker — 60% of confined space deaths are would-be rescuers
- ✗ Relying on the permit from yesterday — conditions change, test and permit fresh each entry
- ✗ Leaving the attendant post to help inside — the attendant NEVER enters, they call for rescue
- ✗ Skipping ventilation because "it smells fine" — your nose cannot detect oxygen levels

Safety Tips to Remember

- ✓ When in doubt, stay out — if any reading is abnormal, do NOT enter until corrected
- ✓ Continuous monitoring — gas levels can change in minutes, keep your meter on at all times
- ✓ Never enter alone — attendant, communication, and rescue must always be in place
- ✓ Know your rescue plan — every entrant must know how they will be extracted in an emergency
- ✓ If the alarm sounds, evacuate immediately — don't investigate, get out and report

Discussion Questions for Your Team

1. What confined spaces exist on our current job site?
2. Who is qualified to be the entry supervisor and authorize permits?
3. Is our atmospheric monitoring equipment calibrated and ready?
4. Does everyone know the rescue plan and evacuation procedure?
5. What would you do if the attendant needed to leave their post?

TOOLBOX TALK SIGN-OFF

Date: _____ Supervisor: _____

Project: _____ Location: _____

Attendance sheet attached: [] Yes