What is a confined space?

It is a work space that has:

- Limited or restricted ways to get in and get out and
- Is not designed for people to work in it

Examples of confined spaces are:

- Tanks
- Boilers
- Vessels
- Vaults
- Pipes
- Manholes
- Crawl spaces
- Equipment rooms
- Some HVAC equipment
- And even trenches and excavations

How can a confined space kill me?

Hundreds of construction workers are severely injured in confined spaces each year, and many of them die.

- Lack of oxygen
- Explosive or flammable vapors
- Toxic fumes
- Uncontrolled fluids can enter and drown you
- Flowable solids like grain or sand

More than a third of the confined space deaths happen to untrained co-workers or friends who try to rescue a worker who has collapsed in a confined space.

Learn More: The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) issued a standard for Confined Spaces in Construction in 2015. To find the Standard, compliance assistance, and other resources visit www.osha.gov/confinedspaces/index.html.

Find out more about construction hazards.

Get more of these Hazard Alert cards – and cards on other topics.

Call 301-578-8500

Know the basics ...

1 Ask questions

It is the employer's responsibility to provide a safe workplace. If you think you may be entering a confined space, ask the competent person on your worksite. Do not enter without proper training. Never enter alone.

A self-employed handyman died in this water service manhole. He had been called to fix a water leak in an adjacent rental house and was working alone.

2 Get training

Your employer must train you for confined space work (an online course is not adequate). Know possible hazards before entering and be sure they are addressed in the entry plan. Make sure there is an emergency plan in place. Don’t assume nothing will go wrong; confined spaces are unforgiving.

75% of workers killed in confined spaces had no training or only on-the-job training. These students are getting hands-on training from a qualified instructor.

3 Test air before entering

Never enter a confined space before air is tested. The employer must have the air checked first for proper oxygen levels, then for flammable or explosive gases or vapors, and finally for toxic gases or vapors. If there is a problem with the air, don’t go in.

Master instructor shows students how to test air quality inside a confined space.

Control the hazards your work may create

Remember that the work you are doing in a confined space may create hazards.

- Painting can create flammable or explosive hazards with solvents.
- Welding introduces toxins.
- Shielding gases can push all of the oxygen out of a confined space.

Control these hazards with adequate ventilation.

If you think you are in danger:

Contact your supervisor.
Contact your union.
Call OSHA 1-800-321-OSHA

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