

TOOLBOX TALK

Confined spaces toolbox talk

About six minutes · Confined Spaces Regulations 1997

SITE

DATE

GIVEN BY

WHY IT MATTERS

HSE describes a case that repeats across industries. Two men went into a closed compartment to fix a fault. Within a minute one had passed out. Two more went in to save him and were overcome too. The emergency services got the three men out, and two of them died. Water had rusted the inside of the compartment and the rust had used up the oxygen. Nobody had tested the air.

That is how confined space deaths usually happen. The air looks normal and smells of nothing. The first person collapses, and the people who die next are the ones who go in to help. This talk is about testing first, having a plan to get people out, and never going in to rescue without it.

HSE, Introduction to working in confined spaces

THE POINTS TO MAKE

- ☐ **What makes a space confined**
It is not about size. A space is confined in law when it is enclosed or largely enclosed and there is a foreseeable risk of fire or explosion, of passing out from heat, gas, fume or lack of oxygen, of drowning from rising water, or of being engulfed by something like sand or grain. A manhole, a tank, a sewer, a duct, a deep pit or a sealed void can all qualify.
- ☐ **The safe system and the permit**
If entry is needed, it is planned and done under a safe system of work, and most sites use a permit to enter. The permit says who is going in, what has been isolated, what the air test showed, what is being worn, who is watching from outside and how a rescue would work. Only people trained for confined space work go in. Nobody goes in on a hunch.
- ☐ **Test the air, and keep testing**
Bad air gives no warning. Lack of oxygen, hydrogen sulphide from sewage, carbon monoxide from engines, or flammable vapour can all be present with no smell you would notice. A trained person tests the air from outside before anyone enters, at different depths, and a monitor stays with the person inside. If the alarm goes, everyone gets out at once.
- ☐ **The rescue plan comes first**
Before anyone goes in, there is a plan to get them out, with the kit on site and people trained to use it: a harness and lifeline, a winch or tripod, breathing apparatus, resuscitation equipment. Waiting for the fire service is not a rescue plan. If someone collapses inside, never go in after them. Raise the alarm and follow the plan.

- ☐ **Do it from outside if you can**
The law's first rule is not to go in unless the work cannot be done any other way. Can a camera, a long-handled tool, a remote cleaning head or a different design do the job from outside? Can the tank be cleaned without a person in it? Every time we avoid entry, we take the whole risk away. Only when there is no other way do we plan to go in.
- ☐ **Isolate and ventilate**
Before entry, lock off anything that could flood the space, move, or let gas or steam in: valves, pumps, agitators and pipes. Ventilate the space if it can be done, and keep engines, generators and compressors well away from the opening, because their exhaust can fill the space. Do not use petrol or diesel equipment inside. Do not add oxygen to sweeten the air; it is a fire risk.
- ☐ **The person outside**
Nobody works in a confined space alone. A trained person stays at the entrance the whole time, in touch with the people inside, watching the conditions and ready to raise the alarm. They do not go in themselves. Their job is to know everyone is all right, to call for help, and to start the rescue the plan describes, from outside if it can be done that way.

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TOOLBOX TALK, CONTINUED

Confined spaces toolbox talk: do, do not, and the questions

DO

- Ask whether the job can be done without anyone going in.
- Check there is a permit and a rescue plan before entering.
- Make sure the air has been tested and keep the monitor with you inside.
- Keep someone at the entrance for the whole time anyone is inside.
- Get out straight away if the monitor alarms, you feel unwell or conditions change.
- Keep engines and generators well away from the opening.

DO NOT

- Do not enter a confined space you have not been trained and authorised to enter.
- Do not trust your nose. Many dangerous gases have no smell you would notice.
- Do not go in after someone who has collapsed. Raise the alarm and follow the rescue plan.
- Do not use oxygen to freshen the air in a space.
- Do not assume a space is safe today because it was safe yesterday.

ASK THE TEAM

- ? Which spaces on this job could count as confined, and does anyone go into them?
- ? Could we do that work from outside instead?
- ? Who is trained to test the air, and where is the gas monitor kept?
- ? If someone collapsed in that chamber now, what would we do, step by step?
- ? Who is trained in the rescue kit, and when was it last checked?

TO CLOSE

Confined spaces kill people who were sure they would be fine, and then they kill the people who go in to help. The air looks normal and smells of nothing. So we do it from outside if we can. If we cannot, we isolate, ventilate, test, keep testing, keep someone at the top, and have the rescue ready before anyone goes in. And if someone goes down inside, you do not follow them. You raise the alarm and follow the plan. That is how two deaths do not become four.

Record it. Who gave the talk, where, when, who was there and what was raised. The last page is the record.

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ATTENDANCE RECORD

Confined spaces toolbox talk: given and understood

Each person signs on the day to say they were present and understood the talk. Anyone who joins the team later is given the talk before starting, and signs here.

SITE	DATE	TIME	GIVEN BY
NAME	COMPANY	TRADE OR ROLE	SIGNATURE

QUESTIONS RAISED, AND THE ANSWERS GIVEN	ACTIONS AGREED, WHO AND BY WHEN	
TALK GIVEN BY (SIGNATURE)	POSITION	DATE

MANAGEMENT OF HEALTH AND SAFETY AT WORK REGULATIONS 1999, REGULATION 10: INFORMATION FOR EMPLOYEES

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