

Everyday Safety

Tailgate Talks

Confined Space Safety

This Everyday Safety Tailgate Talk is a modified reproduction of the August 2020 "Safety Pins," by Philip E. Spiezio, Safety Officer, Washington County Office of the Safety Officer

WHAT IS A CONFINED SPACE?

A space that is considered a confined space has the following characteristics:

- A space that is large enough to bodily enter
- A space that has limited means of entry or exit
- A space not designed for continuous employee occupancy



WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

Many confined spaces contain hazardous substances or dangerous conditions. Hazards could include:

- Poor Air Quality - Atmospheres with an oxygen content less than 19.5% (deficient) or more than 23% (enriched) are not safe.
- Toxic Gasses - Hydrogen sulphide, carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, smoke, ammonia, chlorine, etc. are all potentially deadly.
- Flammable Atmospheres - A highly explosive atmosphere can be created when finely ground combustible materials such as grain, carbon, cellulose, fibers, plastics or flammable liquids are present.
- Mechanical, Electrical or Physical Hazards - Examples include moving parts, structural hazards, noise, temperature and visibility.
- Loose Materials that may Engulf or Smother - Shifting or collapse of bulk material, barrier failures, water/sewer valve or line failures, etc.

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WHAT CAN WE DO TO PROTECT OURSELVES?

The dangers and risks associated with confined spaces are not always obvious.

- Develop a plan - Conduct a risk assessment and know the practices and procedures.
- Have readily available adequate atmospheric testing and monitoring capabilities.
- Ensure proper engineering controls are established.
- Use appropriate personal protective equipment.
- Ensure a competent watch person is present with an effective emergency response plan. The watch person must have communication with the emergency response team & the person in the confined space at all times. Be sure you have a solid rescue plan.

Above all else, ensure that all personnel involved in the confined space process are competent to do the job safely. Many workers are injured and killed each year while working in confined spaces. **An estimated 60% of the fatalities have been among the would-be rescuers.** Unless you are trained in confined space hazards and how to control them, never enter a confined space.

Resources and References:

OSHA Confined Spaces Webpage:

<https://www.osha.gov/confined-spaces>

CDC Confined Spaces Webpage:

<https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/confinedspace/default.html>

