



SAFETY ALERT

Confined Space Entry

Subject: Fatal Confined Space Incident – Hydrogen Sulfide Exposure

Summary of Incident:

On August 28, 2024, three workers tragically lost their lives while performing work at a sewer facility in Trinity County, Texas. While attempting to cap a leaking sewer line in a manhole, one worker was overcome by toxic hydrogen sulfide (H₂S) gas. Two additional workers entered the confined space in an attempted rescue were also fatally overcome. All three were found unconscious and later pronounced deceased.

Key Facts:

Hydrogen sulfide is a toxic, flammable, colorless gas with a 'rotten egg' odor. It is heavier than air and can quickly accumulate in manholes, tanks, pits, and sewer lines. At high concentrations, H₂S causes rapid unconsciousness and death within minutes. Attempting rescue without proper protection and procedures often leads to multiple fatalities.

Lessons Learned:

No one should ever enter a confined space (such as a manhole) without following the company Confined Space Entry Permit process located at www.iws.support. Bystander or 'rescue attempts' without respiratory protection and proper rescue equipment greatly increase the risk of multiple fatalities. Continuous atmospheric testing is required before and during entry. Ventilation and retrieval systems must be in place prior to entry. An Attendant must remain outside the space at all times and never enter to attempt a rescue.

Required Actions for All Crews:

Confined Space Entry Permit: A permit must be completed and approved before entry.

Atmospheric Testing: Test for oxygen levels, flammables, hydrogen sulfide, and other toxic gases before and throughout the entry.

Ventilation: Maintain forced-air ventilation whenever possible.

Respiratory Protection: Use supplied-air respirators when hazards cannot be controlled below safe levels.

Rescue Preparedness: Retrieval systems (tripod, winch, harness) must be in place for a permit required entry. Attendants must not enter. Only trained rescue teams may perform rescues.

Stop Work Authority: Any crew member has the authority to stop work if permit requirements are not being met.

Reminder: These three lives were lost because confined space entry and rescue procedures were not fully followed. Always follow your training and permit system. Do not enter without a permit. Do not attempt rescue without proper equipment.

Let's learn from this tragedy and ensure every one of us goes home safe.