



019: Confined Space Pre-Planning

Confined spaces and your planning

Confined space work requires certain documentation and planning, which are the responsibility of your management. However, you are the one entering the confined space. While your foreman and other parties do their best to ensure your safety, they can make mistakes. So, be sure to do some advance work of your own. Such work should involve the following steps.

Generic

Review your company's confined space safety procedures. Read them with a highlighter and pen. If you don't understand something in that procedure, address the question to your foreman and/or the safety director.

Review a copy of your company's standard blank Confined Space Permit or Confined Space Permit blank form. Notice the kind of information this form requires. Think of how you would verify the items on that form.

For a specific job

Review the job safety survey personally. If you don't understand something in that survey, follow the "show me" principle until you do understand. Don't accept pat explanations.

Never sign off on something you have not personally verified. Don't sign off on a promise of correction, either. Sign off only when the condition is actually met.

You must re-verify with each entry into a confined space. You have no way of knowing what has changed or not changed in your absence. This means you need a new Confined Space Permit at the start of your shift. You cannot continue on the previous shift's permit.

The Confined Space Permit must bear the signatures of everyone entering the confined space, and it must be posted at or near the point of entry. Your signature means you have verified the conditions of the Permit have been met. Do not sign for anyone else, and do not let anyone sign for you. Do your own inspection. Do not allow a majority vote or other pressure to convince you to waive your responsibility to do a personal inspection.

Don't assume the checklists and other documentation cover everything you need—people make mistakes. Physically walk through the documentation in a "dry run" as close as possible to actual conditions. Look closely at the means of ingress and egress, emergency extraction, fall protection, and contingency plans.

Ensure the plan provides for a way to safely pass tools, equipment, and materials into and out of the work area.

Think through the job to be done, and assess how realistic the estimates are for time and personnel.

Assess the adequacy of ventilation. For example, a fan placed at the entrance of a large vessel might produce a reasonable temperature at the entrance. But, if the air isn't flowing through the vessel, the temperature farther in may be dangerous.

The same principle applies to gas mixtures. Use safe procedures to check for the presence of gases at all levels. Some gases are lighter heavier than air and will settle in low spots.

Discussion leader duties for this session:

Obtain a copy of the company's confined space safety procedures and Confined Space Permit form, and make photocopies for each attendee.

Obtain some gear used to work in confined spaces. This gear can include wrist-strap emergency extraction equipment, respirators, and gas meters.

What this Safety Talk covers:

What the worker needs to know and do to before signing off on the Confined Space Permit.

Discussion notes :

