



Confined Spaces



Confined spaces, which can include tanks, silos and tunnels, are defined as spaces that are either substantially or entirely enclosed, or where access presents one or more specified risks. These include injury from fire or explosion, asphyxiation, drowning, or loss of consciousness from an increase in body temperature, or the inhalation of gas, fume, vapour or lack of oxygen.

Why it matters

- Working in confined spaces can be extremely dangerous; hazards may not be visible or obvious, and conditions can change rapidly
- Every year, lives are lost due to poor planning or lack of awareness
- 60 % of fatalities in confined spaces are would-be rescuers
- The most common causes of death are lack of oxygen, toxic gas exposure, and engulfment
- Even short exposure to low oxygen levels (below 19.5%) can cause unconsciousness or death.



Ask yourself

- Do I actually need to enter the space?
- Am I trained, competent and authorised to enter?
- Is there a valid work permit and rescue plan in place?
- Have I identified all potential hazards?
- Is there a safe system of work in place?



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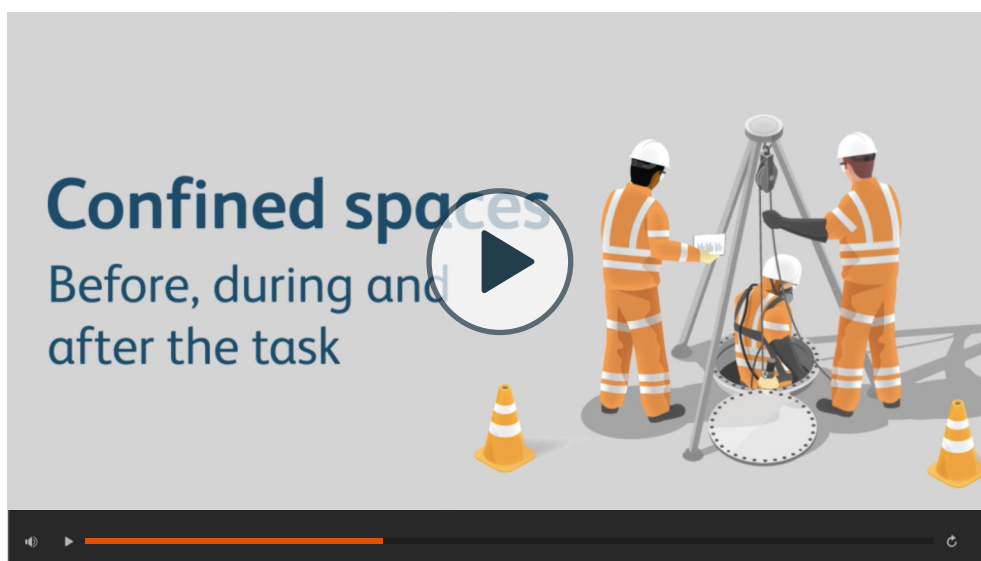


What to do



Confined spaces - Before, during and after work

Select the play button below to see the key points.



Key points

Before Entry

- Identify the space – Is it confined? Use the Confined Space Risk Assessment Tool
- Assess the risks – A full risk assessment should be carried out by a competent person, and a Safe System of Work, which includes emergency arrangements, drawn up and implemented
- Permit to Work – A valid permit to work should be issued and signed off by those responsible
- Safe System of Work – Establish the safe system, paying special attention to any atmospheric testing, ventilation and RPE requirements
- Rescue plan – Must be specific, rehearsed and include trained personnel.



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What to do



During Entry

- Wear appropriate PPE and/or RPE (e.g. harness, gas monitor, communications)
- Maintain constant communication with all parties
- Never work alone – Always have a standby person outside the space
- If specified, monitor the atmosphere continuously.

After Exit

- Report any issues or near misses
- Review the process for improvements
- Sign off the permit to confirm you have left the space, and completed any final safety checks.

Do

- ✓ Always treat confined spaces with caution, even if you've entered them before
- ✓ Use a buddy system – Always have a standby person in a position of safety
- ✓ Check and calibrate all relevant equipment
- ✓ Know your escape route and rescue plan
- ✓ Stop work immediately if conditions change.

Don't

- ✗ Don't assume a space is safe just because it was yesterday
- ✗ Don't bypass the permit process
- ✗ Don't enter without atmospheric testing
- ✗ Don't rely on instinct – Follow the procedure
- ✗ Don't attempt a rescue unless trained and authorised.



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What to do



Questions to consider

- 1 Have I confirmed whether the space I'm entering is classified as a confined space and fully understood the specific hazards involved?**
Think about risks such as low oxygen, toxic gases, flooding or limited access.
- 2 Have I received the proper training, permit-to-work and briefing specific to this confined space task?**
Reflect on whether you're fully prepared and authorised to enter.
- 3 Is all necessary equipment (like gas monitors, escape sets, communications tools and PPE) checked and ready before entry?**
Consider whether all safety-critical gear has been tested and is within reach.
- 4 Do I have a designated standby person and a clear emergency rescue plan in place before entering the confined space?**
Think about who is watching over you and how they'll respond if something goes wrong.
- 5 Am I staying alert to changes in the environment while inside the confined space, and ready to exit immediately if conditions change?**
Reflect on how you'll recognise danger signs and react appropriately.

TOP TIPS

- Use the 'Take 5' approach before entry – stop, think, assess, plan and proceed
- If in doubt, don't go in. Always check, challenge and confirm.



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Resources



Resources and support



Legislation

[Confined Spaces Regulations 1997](#)

[Dangerous Substances and Explosive Atmospheres Regulations 2002.](#)



Related NR Standards

[Entry Into Confined Spaces \(NR/L3/MTC/RCS0216/GA09\)](#)

[Confined Spaces Working and Entry Procedure \(NR/L3/MTC/SE0115\)](#)

[Work Activity Risk Assessment \(NR/L2/OHS/00102\)](#)

[Initial Confined Space Pre-assessment \(FE F126\)](#)

[Confined Space Permit to Enter and Rescue Plan \(HO F116\).](#)



Useful Links

[Managing risks and risk assessment at work](#)

[Confined Spaces: A brief guide to working safely \(INDG258\)](#)

[Safe work in confined spaces ACOP and guidance \(L101\).](#)



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