



Confined Space Safety

Most of our municipal and school members have at least one location with a confined space. OSHA defines a confined space as an area that is not necessarily designed for people, large enough for workers to enter and perform certain jobs, has limited or restricted means for entry or exit, and is not designed for continuous occupancy. For our members, confined spaces might include storage tanks, vessels, silos, storage bins, vaults, pits, manholes, tunnels, and equipment housing.

OSHA uses the term permit-required confined space, or permit space, to describe a confined space that has one or more of the following characteristics.

- Contains or has the potential to contain a hazardous atmosphere
- Contains material that has the potential to engulf an entrant
- Has walls that converge inward or floors that slope downward and taper into a smaller area which could trap or asphyxiate an entrant

Confined spaces in municipal wastewater treatment plants can also include digestion and sedimentation tanks, floating covers over tanks, sodium hypochlorite tanks, and wastewater holding tanks. Many of these components also qualify as permit-required confined spaces.

It's not enough to understand OSHA confined space standards and requirements. You must also understand the types of PPE solutions to keep workers safe in confined spaces. Fall protection, gas detection, respiratory protection, and head protection are all important for helping workers enter and exit confined spaces safely.

Confined spaces and permit spaces require labels to alert occupants nearby of the hazards of the space. Employers must review the permit program annually. Additionally, there is a requirement that employee rescue service personnel must make practice rescues at least once every 12 months so confirm this with your local fire rescue operations before entering a permit-required confined space. See OSHA regulations 1910.146(d)(14) and 1910.146(k)(2)(iv) for more information on the mentioned requirements.

If your town, village, city, or fire department has not had confined space training recently, please reach out to your Comp Alliance Risk Control Specialist to schedule it. An excellent resource by OSHA on confined spaces in sewer or water systems can be found at: <https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/publications/OSHA3789.pdf>