

Safety & Wellbeing Information Sheet – Working in Confined Spaces

Each year approximately 15 people in the UK are killed and many injured whilst working in confined spaces. This includes those people who were at work and those who attempted to rescue them without proper training and equipment.

Work in confined spaces is governed by statutory legislation, principally the Confined Spaces Regulations which:

- a) prohibit entry into a confined space to carry out activities unless there is no other reasonably practical alternative means of doing so;
- b) require any activities within confined spaces to be undertaken in accordance with a safe system of work; and
- c) require adequate arrangements to be in place to rescue any person in an emergency situation.



This information sheet aims to provide Council employees with an overview of the health and safety issues associated working in a confined space and what can be expected of the line manager before such work is undertaken.

What is a confined space?

It is not possible to provide a comprehensive list of confined spaces. However, it can be any space of an enclosed nature where there is a risk of death or serious injury from hazardous substances, hot temperatures or dangerous conditions (e.g. lack of oxygen).

Some confined spaces are fairly easy to identify, e.g. enclosures with limited openings:

- storage tanks;
- silos;
- reaction vessels;
- enclosed drains;
- sewers.

Others may be less obvious, but can be equally dangerous, for example:

- open-topped chambers;
- vats;
- combustion chambers in furnaces etc;
- ductwork;
- unventilated or poorly ventilated rooms or spaces.



Some places may become confined spaces when work is carried out, or during their construction, fabrication or subsequent modification. Confined spaces can be found inside and outside buildings and can be both small and large in nature.

What are the dangers from confined spaces?

Dangers can arise in confined spaces because of:

- a lack of oxygen;
- the introduction of poisonous gases, fumes or vapours;
- the influx of liquids and/or solids which can suddenly fill the space;
- residues left in the space which can give off gas, fume or vapour;
- dusts when present in high concentrations, e.g. in flour silos or wood dust in a small room; or
- hot conditions leading to a dangerous increase in body temperature.

Whilst some of these situations may already be present in the confined space, some may arise as a result of the work being carried out, or because of ineffective isolation of plant nearby, e.g. leakage from a pipe connected to the confined space.

Risk Assessments and Safe Systems of Work

The Council are required to undertake a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks associated with all work activities, this includes work within a confined space. The result of the assessment will generate a task specific work instruction, known as a “safe system of work”. It is this safe system of work that will be used to ensure those working in or around a confined space are kept as safe as possible.

The system of work will detail the manner in which the work will take place, the content and level of training needed by those undertaking the activity and the emergency/rescue processes that will be needed in order to allow the activity to take place. Detailed guidance on managing confined space work is available on CONNECT.

Actions

When you have been asked to undertake work within or around a confined space you need to follow the instructions you have been given so you and your colleagues can do so safely.

If you have been asked to work in what you believe to be a confined space and have not received task specific training/briefings then speak to your line manager before starting work

There may be occasions where you will be asked to contribute to a risk assessment and you should do all you can to help.

It is important that you understand the emergency procedures associated with the confined space work as it is not unusual for untrained rescuers to be injured or killed when trying to help

If you have any questions or need clarity on how work within a confined space is to take place then discuss this with **Safety & Wellbeing team** [healthandsafety@northlan.gov.uk](mailto:Safety & Wellbeing healthandsafety@northlan.gov.uk)

Available Resources

AS 29 – Confined Spaces
HSF9 – General Risk Assessment Form (Confined Spaces)