

## OSHA ISSUES FINAL RULE ON CONFINED SPACES IN CONSTRUCTION

On May 4, 2015, OSHA issued a new standard for construction work in confined spaces, which will be effective starting August 3, 2015.

Confined spaces can present physical and atmospheric hazards that can be avoided if they are recognized and addressed prior to entering these spaces to perform work. The new standard, Subpart AA of 29 CFR 1926, will help prevent construction workers from being hurt or killed by eliminating and isolating hazards in confined spaces at construction sites similar to the way workers in other industries are already protected. This new standard emphasizes training, continuous worksite evaluation and communication requirements to further protect workers' safety and health.

**The Confined spaces rule could protect nearly 800 construction workers a year from serious injuries and reduce life-threatening hazards. Construction protections now match those in manufacturing and general industry.**

Manholes, crawl spaces, tanks and other confined spaces are not intended for continuous occupancy. They are also difficult to exit in an emergency. People working in confined spaces face life-threatening hazards including toxic substances, electrocutions, explosions and asphyxiation.

Many companies have been following the general industry rule, however there are some differences with the new construction rule. There are 5 key differences from the construction rule, and several areas where OSHA has clarified existing requirements. The five new requirements include:

1. More detailed provisions requiring coordinated activities when there are multiple employers at the worksite. This will ensure hazards are not introduced into a confined space by workers performing tasks outside the space.
2. Requiring a competent person to evaluate the work site and identify confined spaces, including permit spaces.

3. Requiring continuous atmospheric monitoring whenever possible.
4. Requiring continuous monitoring of engulfment hazards.
5. Allowing for the suspension of a permit, instead of cancellation, in the event of changes from the entry conditions list on the permit or an unexpected event requiring evacuation of the space. The space must be returned to the entry conditions listed on the permit before re-entry.

In addition, OSHA has added provisions to the new rule that clarifies existing requirements in the General Industry standard. These include:

1. Requiring that employers who direct workers to enter a space without using a complete permit system prevent workers' exposure to physical hazards through elimination of the hazard or isolation methods such as lockout/tagout.
2. Requiring that employers who are relying on local emergency services for emergency services arrange for responders to give the employer advance notice if they will be unable to respond for a period of time (because they are responding to another emergency, attending department-wide training, etc.).
3. Requiring employers to provide training in a language and vocabulary that the worker understands.

Finally, several terms have been added to the definitions for the construction rule, such as "entry employer" to describe the employer who directs workers to enter a space, and "entry rescue", added to clarify the differences in the types of rescue employers can use.

Compliance assistance material and additional information is available on OSHA's [Confined Spaces in Construction](http://www.osha.gov/confinedspaces/index.html) Web page: <http://www.osha.gov/confinedspaces/index.html>



# Monthly Toolbox Talk

## Confined Spaces

OSHA has developed a new construction standard for Confined Spaces (29 CFR 1926 Subpart AA).

A confined space is any space that meets the following three criteria:

- Is large enough for a worker to enter it;
- Has limited means of entry or exit; and
- Is not designed for continuous occupancy.

A space may also be a **permit-required** confined space if it has a hazardous atmosphere, the potential for engulfment or suffocation, a layout that might trap a worker through converging walls or a sloped floor, or any other serious safety or health hazard.

### Training

The new Confined Spaces standard requires employers to ensure that their workers know about the existence, location, and dangers posed by each permit-required confined space, and that they may not enter such spaces without authorization.

Employers must train workers involved in permit-required confined space operations so that they can perform their duties safely and understand the hazards in permit spaces and the methods used to isolate, control or protect workers from these hazards. Workers not authorized to perform entry rescues must be trained on the dangers of attempting such measures.

### Safe Entry Requirements

The new Confined Spaces standard includes several requirements for safe entry.

**Preparation:** Before workers can enter a confined space, employers must provide pre-entry planning. This includes:

- Having a competent person evaluate the work site for the presence of confined spaces, including permit-required confined spaces.
- Once the space is classified as a permit-required confined space, identifying the means of entry and exit, proper ventilation methods, and elimination or control of all potential hazards in the space.
- Ensuring that before workers enter, the air in a confined space is tested for: oxygen levels, flammable and toxic substances, and stratified atmospheres.
- If a permit is required for the space, removing or controlling hazards in the space and determining rescue procedures and necessary equipment.
- If the air in a space is not safe for workers, ventilating or using whatever controls or protections are necessary so that employees can safely work in the space.

**Ongoing practices:** After pre-entry planning, employers must ensure that the space is monitored for hazards, especially atmospheric hazards. Effective communication is important because there can be multiple contractors operating on a site, each with its own workers needing to enter the confined space. Attendants outside confined spaces must also make sure that unauthorized workers do not enter them. Rescue attempts by untrained personnel can lead to multiple deaths.

**Personal protective equipment:** Employers should assess the work site to determine what personal protective equipment (PPE) is needed to protect workers. Employers should provide workers with the required PPE and proper training on its use and about any related hazards before the work starts.

