

Confined Space Working

A significant number of people are killed or seriously injured in the UK each year, across a wide range of industries, working in confined spaces. The risks are not limited to those working in confined spaces, but also those tasked to rescue them in an emergency. Confined spaces are defined under the Confined Spaces Regulations 1997. In simple terms it is a place or space which constitutes a foreseeable risk due to its enclosed nature. Risks can arise due to the nature of the confined space, the work carried out within it, and access and egress e.g. falls from height.

MINIMUM STANDARDS

- Areas that should be classed as confined spaces are identified and properly marked as such. This will include spaces with e.g. oxygen enriched or deficient environment, flammable substances, toxic gases, fumes or vapours, potential for the ingress or presence of liquids, potential flow of solid materials and the presence of excess heat.
- A written policy is in place ensuring that a hierarchical approach is taken to avoid the need for employees to enter confined spaces as far as reasonably practicable.
- Where it is not reasonably practicable to avoid entry a risk assessment is completed addressing risks in connection with the space itself and considering the work to be carried out within the space.
- A 'permit system', or other formally documented and strictly controlled procedure is in operation for high risk confined working operations. The permit shall set out:-
 - Those trained and competent individuals authorised to issue permits
 - Personal Protective Equipment requirements
 - Precautions required to isolate utility services, including power where necessary
 - Requirements for testing of hazardous gases, and oxygen pre-entry, and for monitoring of levels during the work process
- Equipment used to test for and monitor hazardous gases and oxygen levels in confined spaces is properly maintained and calibrated.
- Prior to use, equipment is assessed as to suitability and safety in the context of the space in questions (e.g. intrinsically safe lighting). Where breathing apparatus is provided it is properly maintained and tested. Those individuals expected to use breathing apparatus are medically assessed as fit to use the equipment, and are adequately trained in its use.
- No individual is allowed to enter a confined space without first being adequately trained on all hazards and risk associated with entry, and the correct procedure to be followed.
- Written procedures take into account emergency and rescue procedures, including the provision of a standby team, and methods of summoning assistance.
- Through consultation with the occupational health services, an employee's physical and psychological capabilities are assessed prior to the individual being allowed to enter a confined space.

LEGAL REQUIREMENTS

The Confined Spaces Regulations 1997 is the main, but not exclusive, provision here setting out employers duties in relation to work in confined spaces. The Work at Height Regulations 2005 also applies in access/egress situations i.e. 'where there is a risk of a fall liable to cause personal injury'. Where lifting operations are carried out in connection with confined space working the Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 will apply. The general provisions of the Construction (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1996 will apply in Construction Environments. The Provision and Use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998, the Workplace (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1992 and Electricity at Work Regulations 1989 also have relevant provisions.

GUIDANCE & USEFUL INFORMATION

- HSE Website: www.hse.gov.uk/confinedspace/index.htm
- Safe Work in Confined Spaces, Confined Spaces Regulations 1997, ACOP L101

For further information contact RM@UK.qbe.com