CrewSigned

Confined Space Toolbox Talk

5-minute read-aloud · Last reviewed November 24, 2026

A confined space is a space big enough for a person to get into, with limited ways in and out, that is not meant for someone to stay in. Think manholes, vaults, tanks, pits, crawl spaces, attics, sewers, boilers and large ducts. Many of them look harmless. The danger is usually something you cannot see.

The biggest killer in confined spaces is the air. There may not be enough oxygen, because it has been used up by rust or bacteria or pushed out by another gas. There may be toxic gases like hydrogen sulfide or carbon monoxide, or flammable vapors that can ignite. Some of these have no smell, and some knock out your sense of smell. You can walk in feeling fine and be unconscious within a breath or two.

Other dangers include getting buried by grain, sand or liquid, getting caught in moving parts, electrical hazards, extreme heat and walls that slope inward and trap you.

Some confined spaces require a permit before anyone goes in. That means the space has been evaluated, the hazards are controlled, the air has been tested and is being monitored, ventilation is running, energy is locked out, and there is an attendant outside who stays there the whole time. The attendant does not go in. Their job is to watch, stay in contact and call for rescue.

Before entry, the air is tested by a trained person, first for oxygen, then for flammable gases, then for toxic gases. Testing is done at different levels because some gases sink and others rise. If the readings are not safe, nobody goes in.

Here is the most important part. When something goes wrong in a confined space, coworkers often rush in to help, and they become victims too. In many confined space deaths, more than one person dies, and the extra deaths are the would-be rescuers. If someone collapses inside, do not go in after them. Call for help, use the retrieval system if one is set up, and follow the rescue plan.

If you are not sure whether a space is a confined space, ask before you enter. Never go in just to grab a tool.

Discussion questions

1. What spaces on this job could be confined spaces, and which ones are marked or posted?
2. Who is trained to test the air, and what readings would tell us not to go in?
3. If someone collapsed inside a manhole or tank, what would you do and what would you not do?

OSHA standard

29 CFR 1926 Subpart AA, Confined Spaces in Construction
https://www.osha.gov/laws-regs/regulations/standardnumber/1926/1926SubpartAA

SOURCES

Confined Spaces: Is 911 your Confined Space Rescue Plan? Fact Sheet (OSHA FS 3849): https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/publications/OSHA3849.pdf
Confined Spaces in Residential Construction Fact Sheet (OSHA FS 3914): https://www.osha.gov/sites/default/files/publications/OSHA3914.pdf
OSHA Safety and Health Topics, Confined Spaces: https://www.osha.gov/confined-spaces

This talk does not replace training that an OSHA standard requires. Scripts are based on OSHA and NIOSH publications and rewritten in plain language.

Safety Meeting Sign-In Sheet

TOPIC

Confined Space Toolbox Talk

COMPANY

JOB / SITE

DATE

TIME

PRESENTER

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