Toolbox talk

Confined spaces

Never enter without a safe system, never rescue without one

10 minutes

For: Anyone who may work in or near manholes, sewers, tanks, chambers, voids or deep pits

Why it matters

Confined spaces can contain toxic gas, too little oxygen, or fill with water or materials. People die every year in them, and too often it's the workmates who go in to help without the right kit.

Key points

1. A confined space is enclosed and has a risk of serious injury from gas, fumes, lack of oxygen, flooding or engulfment.
2. Examples include manholes, sewers, tanks, chambers, ducts, voids and some trenches.
3. First ask whether the work can be done from outside, without going in at all.
4. If entry is needed, follow a safe system of work. This is often a permit to work.
5. The air must be tested before and during entry by someone trained to use the gas detector.
6. Emergency and rescue arrangements must be in place before anyone goes in.
7. Only trained people with the right equipment can enter, with someone outside keeping watch.
8. Never attempt an unplanned entry rescue. Only trained rescuers with the equipment specified in the rescue plan may enter.

Sources: HSE: Confined spaces; HSE: Confined spaces, a brief guide to working safely (INDG258); HSE: Safe work in confined spaces (L101).

This talk supports, but does not replace, your site-specific risk assessment, method statement, training and supervision. Free to copy and use. **tradefoxapp.com/toolbox-talks/confined-spaces**

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Do

- Check the permit and the gas readings before entering.
- Keep a trained person at the entrance at all times.
- Wear the harness and equipment the safe system of work specifies.
- Get out straight away if the gas alarm goes off or you feel unwell.
- Know how to raise the alarm and how rescue will work.

Don't

- Don't enter any confined space unless you're trained and authorised.
- Don't trust your nose. Many dangerous gases have no smell.
- Don't use petrol or diesel engines in or near the entrance.
- Don't go in after a collapsed workmate. Raise the alarm.

Ask the group

- Which spaces on this site count as confined spaces?
- Who is trained to enter, and who to keep watch?
- What's our rescue plan if someone collapses inside?
- Where is the gas detector, and when was it last calibrated?

If it goes wrong: Do not enter after a casualty. Raise the alarm, call 999 and state that it is a confined space. Follow the planned rescue arrangements. Entry rescuers need suitable training and equipment, including breathing apparatus if the atmosphere requires it.

On this site

Nearest first aider _____ Emergency assembly point _____

Site-specific hazards and controls _____

_____

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Go further: Confined space training in UK construction

Sources: HSE: Confined spaces; HSE: Confined spaces, a brief guide to working safely (INDG258); HSE: Safe work in confined spaces (L101).

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Attendance register

Confined spaces

Site / project _____ Date and time _____

Presented by _____ Company _____

	Name (print)	Company	Signature
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
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10			
11			
12			
13			
14			

By signing, attendees confirm they took part in this toolbox talk and understood the key points. Keep this record with your site safety file.

Presenter signature _____ Follow-up actions _____

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Quick check

Confined spaces

Tick one answer for each question. Your presenter has the answers.

Name _____ Date _____

1. What should you ask first about confined space work?

- [ ] Who's going in?
- [ ] Can it be done from outside?
- [ ] Where's the ladder?

2. A workmate collapses inside a manhole. What do you do?

- [ ] Go in and pull them out
- [ ] Raise the alarm and follow the rescue plan
- [ ] Wait and see

3. Can you rely on smell to detect dangerous gas?

- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] Only for gas leaks

4. When must rescue arrangements be in place?

- [ ] Before anyone goes in
- [ ] Once there's a problem
- [ ] Only for deep spaces

5. The gas alarm goes off while you're inside. What do you do?

- [ ] Finish the job quickly
- [ ] Get out straight away
- [ ] Turn the alarm off

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For the presenter

Answers and sources

Quick check answers

1. Can it be done from outside?

The Confined Spaces Regulations require you to avoid entry where reasonably practicable.

2. Raise the alarm and follow the rescue plan

Many deaths are would-be rescuers. Only go in with breathing apparatus and training.

3. No

Many dangerous gases have no smell, and some deaden your sense of smell. Use a gas detector.

4. Before anyone goes in

Emergency arrangements must be ready before entry, not worked out during an emergency.

5. Get out straight away

Leave immediately and don't go back in until the cause is found and the air is safe.

Sources

- HSE: Confined spaces
  https://www.hse.gov.uk/confinedspace/index.htm
- HSE: Confined spaces, a brief guide to working safely (INDG258)
  https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg258.pdf
- HSE: Safe work in confined spaces (L101)
  https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l101.htm

> **Presenting tips:** keep it to about 10 minutes, use real examples from your site, ask the group questions rather than reading everything out, and record attendance on the register.

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No permit.
No entry.
No exceptions.

1. **Test the air first**
2. **Someone always outside**
3. **No unplanned entry rescue**



Confined spaces toolbox talk

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Sources and qualifications

Confined spaces

Scope: Great Britain safety legislation unless a nation is identified. Northern Ireland has separate legislation. Site rules can be stricter than minimum legal duties; use the site assessment, instructions and competent supervision.

A4 interface: Section 706 concerns conducting locations with restricted movement. Not every confined space falls within that scope. A competent electrical designer must select the applicable protective measures.

A4 basis: published IET guidance on BS 7671:2018+A4:2026. The full licensed standard was not available for clause-by-clause verification. This is an editorial/source review, not installation certification. IET: current edition.

S1. HSE INDG258: Confined spaces

Definition, avoidance, safe system, permits as needed, atmospheric assessment/testing, watch/communications and planned rescue; all key points and quiz.

https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg258.pdf

S2. HSE L101: Safe work in confined spaces

Detailed entry and rescue arrangements, competent people and equipment selected for the risks. Breathing apparatus is required where the atmosphere demands it.

https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l101.htm

S3. HSE: Electrically powered equipment

Electrical equipment in conductive spaces with restricted movement needs extra precautions. Section 706 is not a blanket rule for every confined space.

https://www.hse.gov.uk/electricity/electricequip.htm

Presenter qualification: The permit/no-entry poster is a conservative site rule. The rescue plan determines equipment; breathing apparatus is essential where the atmosphere cannot be made safe to breathe.