

Confined Space Entry

Confined spaces regulations 1997

Any work activities involving entry into substantially enclosed places where inadequate ventilation could result in certain hazardous situations arising are subject to the Confined Spaces Regulations 1997. They are supported by an Approved Code of Practice and replace, but are consistent with, the requirements under Section 30 of the Factories Act 1961 and a few minor pieces of older legislation which although not directly applying to Universities defined a standard to be adopted under other health and safety legislation.

Physical risks such as tripping over cables, electric shock, noise or striking against the walls, roof etc are covered by other regulations.

Specifically:

A confined space means "any place including any chamber, tank, vat, silo, pit, trench, pipe, sewer, flue, well or any other similar place in which, by virtue of its enclosed nature, there arises a reasonably foreseeable specified risk".

A specified risk means a risk of -

- a. injury from fire or explosion, eg ignition of a build up of flammable gas/vapour or oxygen enrichment.
- b. loss of consciousness; from increased body temp eg. heat stress from a hot workplace (such as from entry into a furnace which has not cooled down fully) or from the effect of the amount of protective clothing needed to be worn.
- c. loss of consciousness or asphyxiation arising from gas, fume, vapour or lack of oxygen.
- d. drowning as a result of an increase in the level of liquid, eg. the filling of a vat as could occur if the supply pipes had not been properly isolated.
- e. asphyxiation arising from a free flowing solid (such as flour, grain, sugar or sand) or from being prevented from reaching a respirable atmosphere by entrapment by a free flowing solid.

As well as sewer work, or welding inside a tank as obvious examples, simpler situations such as the use of cleaning fluids to valet the inside of a car must be considered.

The Regulations require:

1. Assess the work to see if entry can be avoided eg. by adopting different working arrangements.
2. If it is not reasonably practical to avoid entry then the precautions need to be identified in a written risk assessment. A written safe system of work must be produced and entry must be in accordance with a "permit to work".
3. Emergency arrangements for rescue and resuscitation, raising the alarm etc are required.
4. There are also provisions relating to access opening sizes, breathing apparatus or other respiratory protective equipment, ropes and harnesses and training.

Action

The safety requirements for this type of activity must be brought to the attention of those who may be involved.

Project risk assessments must include the measures required by these regulations if relevant.

Further information is available from the Safety Office.

HSE publication L101 (ISBN 0 7176 1405 0) 7.50, contains the regulations, approved code of practice and useful guidance. A copy is available in the Safety Office.

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