

## **Does Your Confined Spaces Program Meet OSHA Requirements?**

Many, or perhaps even most, workplaces have something on the premises that would be correctly termed a "confined space." If you have regulated confined spaces, you need to have a confined spaces program to protect workers.

OSHA defines a confined space as a space that is large enough and configured in such a way that a person can enter and perform work inside, but has limited or restricted means of entry/exit, and is not designed for continuous occupancy.

Examples of confined spaces include storage tanks, pits, silos, vats, degreasers, boilers, ventilation and exhaust ducts, sewers, tunnels, underground utility vaults, wells, shafts, and deep trenches.

Confined spaces can be dangerous places in which to work because:

- \* The ventilation is likely to be poor, and dangerous levels of air contamination or oxygen deficiency can occur. Or the atmosphere may be flammable.
- \* Stored products may shift and be unstable.
- \* There may be physical barriers to movement and it can be difficult to get into or to remove an injured worker from the space because of the size or location of entrances and exits.

### **Written Program Requirement**

Employers whose operations may require workers to enter spaces defined by the OSHA standard as permit-required confined spaces must have a written program that provides proper protection including:

- \* Prohibiting entry without a permit approved by the supervisor, and protecting and posting the openings to bar unauthorized entry
- \* Testing the atmosphere before entry for oxygen content and for any flammable gases and vapors or toxic air contaminants and then purging the atmosphere of hazardous elements
- \* Providing appropriate ventilation, lighting, and personal protective equipment for the entrant
- \* Having at least one attendant on standby outside the space in continuous communication with the worker inside, wearing protective equipment, and equipped with a lifeline or harness in case a rescue is needed
- \* Arranging necessary rescue equipment, personnel, and procedures
- \* Training all workers who will be involved in any activities related to regulated confined spaces

That last OSHA requirement for confined spaces programs bears repeating - training all workers who will be involved in any activities related to regulated confined spaces.

*Source: BLR Safety Daily Advisor, 7-30-09*