

Confined Space Emergency Procedures

When things go wrong, people may be exposed to serious and immediate danger. Effective arrangements for raising the alarm and carrying out rescue operations in an emergency are essential. Contingency plans will depend on the nature of the confined space, the risks identified and consequently the likely nature of an emergency rescue.

Confined Space Rescue can be broken down into 2 categories:

Non Entry Rescue - At a minimum, employers must have a plan and response capabilities for non entry rescue. The Attendant, communications (alert 911, EMS) and non entry retrieval equipment will form the backbone of this type of response plan.

Entry Rescue - Entry rescue requires sophisticated training and response plans. Your response capabilities must reflect the level of risk/hazard associated with the task(s). The Department of Environment and Labour may assist you in determining the reasonable steps you should consider.

Emergency arrangements will depend on the risks. Your procedure shall include:

Communications

How can an emergency be communicated from inside the confined space to people outside so that rescue procedures can start? Don't forget night and shift work, weekends and times when the premises are closed, eg holidays. Also, consider what might happen and how the alarm can be raised. The Confined Space Attendant must have communications tools at his/her disposal to contact emergency services i.e. cell phone, 2 way radio, land line.

Rescue and resuscitation equipment

Provision of suitable rescue and resuscitation equipment will depend on the likely emergencies identified. Where such equipment is provided for use by rescuers, training in correct operation is essential.

Capabilities of rescuers

There need to be properly trained people, sufficiently fit to carry out their task, ready at hand, and capable of using any equipment provided for rescue, eg winches, retrieval devices, breathing apparatus, lifelines and firefighting equipment. Rescuers also need to be protected against the cause of the emergency.

Shut down

It may be necessary to shut down adjacent plant before attempting emergency rescue.

First-aid procedures

Trained first aiders need to be available to make proper use of any necessary first-aid equipment provided. The Confined Space attendant must hold a valid current first aid training certificate.

Local emergency services

How are the local emergency services (eg, fire department) made aware of an incident? What information about the particular dangers in the confined space is given to them on their arrival? If you are relying on the 911 service, what are the rescue capabilities in the work area. Urban centres often have response capabilities however this may not be true in smaller communities. It is wise to discuss response capabilities with the authority in advance of the work activity.

Remember..... a rescue procedure must be specific to the work environment and hazards associated with the entry.