



SAFETY ALERT

Confined Space Regulations - Are You In Compliance?

The concrete pipe industry has been around much longer than Confined Space regulations and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA); which makes it very hard for our industry to recognize we may be working with spaces and hazards covered by this regulation. When our employees encounter confined spaces in our facilities and out in the field, it's our responsibility to ensure they complete their work safely and in compliance with OSHA regulations (29 CFR 1910.146 and 29 CFR 1926.21).

What is a Confined Space?

A confined space is simply a space that meets all of the following requirements: (1) An employee can bodily enter the space and perform assigned work; (2) The space has limited or restricted means for entry or exit; (3) The space is not designed for continuous employee occupancy.

As a point of emphasis, when considering limited or restricted means for entry or exit you must also consider the configuration inside the space (such as in a mixer.) One of the best ways to think about this is to ask yourself the following question...does the access or egress promote self rescue if the employee were exposed to a hazard?

The concrete pipe industry does have many spaces which meet all of the above requirements and it's important for every member of our industry to recognize such spaces and comply with OSHA regulations.

What is a Permit-Required Confined Space?

A permit-required confined space is a confined space that contains one or more of the following hazards: (1) Contains or has a potential to contain a hazardous atmosphere; (2) Contains a material that has the potential for engulfing an entrant; (3) Has an internal configuration such that an entrant could be trapped or asphyxiated by inwardly converging walls or by a floor which slopes downward and tapers to a smaller cross-section; or (4) Contains any other recognized serious safety or health hazard.

In the concrete pipe industry we work with many materials and machines that can produce a hazardous atmosphere (lower explosive limit, lean or rich oxygen content, toxic or hazardous, or any other atmospheric condition that is immediately dangerous to life or health.) We also work with many materials (rock, sand, cement, flyash, concrete, etc....) which can engulf an entrant and equipment (silos, bins, hoppers, etc....) which can trap an entrant.

What can you do?

First, evaluate your facility by identifying spaces which meet the requirements of a confined space, as defined by 29 CFR 1910.146. Next, evaluate each identified confined space for hazards which would require a permit for entry into the space.

If you determine that a permit space(s) does exist at your facility you have some very important actions to take: (1) Inform exposed employees, by posting danger signs or by any other equally effective means, of the existence and location of and the danger posed by the permit spaces; (2) Decide if your employees will enter the space(s); (3) If employees will not enter the permit space(s), you must take effective measures to ensure they will not enter; (4) If employees will enter the space(s), you must develop a permit space program that complies with 29 CFR 1910.146.