TOOLBOX TALK #42

CONFINED SPACE IN CONSTRUCTION

Confined spaces maintain a high prevalence across numerous sectors within the construction industry, which present significant acute hazards to life and health. Industries in which confined space entry may be required include sewer and water, highway, bridge, commercial and industrial building construction. OSHA designates an area as confined space when 3 primary conditions are met:

1. Must be large enough for a worker to successfully enter the space to conduct job operations.
2. Must have limited means of access and egress, rendering it difficult to exit in an emergency situation.
3. Must not be designed for continuous employee occupancy.

Common examples of confined spaces in the construction industry include storm drains, manholes, crawl spaces and storage tanks.

To be classified as a **permit-required confined space**, an area must first meet each of the 3 defining requirements above. But to be a permit-required confined space, it must also present one or more of the following hazards:

1. Contains or has the potential to contain a hazardous atmosphere
2. Contains a material that has the potential for engulfing an entrant
3. Has an internal configuration that might cause an entrant to be trapped or asphyxiated by inwardly converging walls or by a floor that slopes downward and tapers to a smaller cross section
4. Contains any other recognized serious safety or health hazards

These hazards may be present under normal conditions within the space either by design or through normal environmental factors. The demands of work operations inside a confined space, such as hot work or equipment operation, may cause the permit-required criteria to be met in confined spaces that would otherwise not be considered permit-required.

In construction settings where confined space work is required, employers must ensure adherence to Subpart AA of the OSHA standard for Construction (29 CFR 1926).