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Confined Space Safety

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Most IPSC employees are required to be trained yearly on confined spaces and some work in confined spaces almost daily, but do we know how many potential confined spaces there are on site and what must be done in order to ensure our safety when working in them?

At IPSC there are over 150 potential confined spaces. Remember—a confined space is a space which has all three of the following characteristics:

- Large enough and so configured that an employee can bodily enter and perform assigned work.
- Has limited or restricted means for entry or exit.
- Is not designed for continuous employee occupancy.

Not all confined spaces are the same, but to be considered a confined space the space needs to have all three of the aforementioned characteristics.

Confined spaces can be classified as non-permit confined spaces or permit required confined spaces. Classification depends on additional hazards or characteristics found within the confined space or that have been introduced into the confined space by the work being performed.

In order for a confined space to be classified as a permit required confined space, it must have one or more of the following characteristics in addition to the criteria that designate a confined space:

- Contains, or has the potential to contain, a hazardous atmosphere.
- Contains a material capable of engulfing the entrant.
- 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.
- Contains any other recognized serious safety or health hazard.

All confined spaces, non-permit or permit required, are required to have an initial air check completed by Safety personnel. The initial air check will test for:

- Oxygen—19.5% to 23.5%
- Combustible Gas—less than 10%
- Toxic Materials

Working in a permit required confined spaces requires the following:

- A confined space attendant must be present whenever personnel are inside the confined space.
- Air checks must be done before entry into the permit required confined space every time the space has been unoccupied.
- Rescue services must be notified and readily available whenever entry into a permit required confined space is going to take place.
- Attendant's log must be kept and the entry of every entrant documented.

Remember whenever required to work in a confined space, whether it is a non-permit or permit required confined space, we need to ensure that all safety precautions and procedures are being followed. A confined space may look safe, but looks can be deceiving.

