

1. INTRODUCTION

Confined spaces pose dangers because they are usually not designed to be areas where people work. Confined spaces often have poor ventilation which allows hazardous atmospheres to quickly develop, especially if the space is small. The hazards are not always obvious and may change from one entry into the confined space to the next.

The risks of working in confined spaces include:

- loss of consciousness, impairment, injury or death due to the immediate effects of airborne contaminants
- fire or explosion from the ignition of flammable contaminants
- difficulty rescuing and treating an injured or unconscious person
- asphyxiation resulting from oxygen deficiency or immersion in a free-flowing material, such as liquids, grain, sand, fertiliser or water.

1.1 What is a confined space?

A confined space is determined by the hazards associated with a set of specific circumstances and not just because work is performed in a small space.

Regulation 5: A confined space means an enclosed or partially enclosed space that:

- is not designed or intended primarily to be occupied by a person; and
- is, or is designed or intended to be, at normal atmospheric pressure while any person is in the space; and
- is or is likely to be a risk to health and safety from:
 - an atmosphere that does not have a safe oxygen level, or
 - contaminants, including airborne gases, vapours and dusts, that may cause injury from fire or explosion, or
 - harmful concentrations of any airborne contaminants, or
 - engulfment.

Confined spaces are commonly found in vats, tanks, pits, pipes, ducts, flues, chimneys, silos, containers, pressure vessels, underground sewers, wet or dry wells, shafts, trenches, tunnels or other similar enclosed or partially enclosed structures, when these examples meet the definition of a confined space in the WHS Regulation.

What is not a confined space for the purposes of the WHS Regulation?

A confined space does not include a mine shaft or the workings of a mine.

The following kinds of workplaces are also generally not confined spaces for the purposes of the WHS Regulation:

- places that are intended for human occupancy and have adequate ventilation, lighting and safe means of entry and exit, such as offices and workshops
- some enclosed or partially enclosed spaces that at particular times have harmful airborne contaminants but are designed for a person to occupy, for example abrasive blasting or spray painting booths
- enclosed or partially enclosed spaces that are designed to be occasionally occupied by a person if the space has a readily and conveniently accessible means of entry and exit via a doorway at ground level, for example: