

Risk Element

- Working in a confined space is dangerous because of the risks from noxious fumes, reduced oxygen levels, or a risk of fire;
- Other dangers may include flooding/drowning or asphyxiation from some other source such as dust, grain or other contaminant.

Precautions to Eliminate/reduce Risk

Wherever possible, you should avoid carrying out tasks in confined spaces. Where this is not possible, you must assess the risks of the particular confined space and plan how you will control those risks. For example if:

- A confined space has noxious fumes, you should consider how these can be ventilated or removed;
- There is a risk of liquids or gases flooding in, you should establish whether the valves can be locked shut;
- Someone is going into a confined space and there is not enough oxygen to breathe properly, you must provide breathing apparatus or ventilate the space to increase oxygen levels before entering;
- There must be emergency arrangements when necessary.

If someone is working in a confined space, think about the following:

- How will you know they are okay and haven't been overcome by fumes?;
- How will you get them out if they are overcome? (It is not enough to rely on the emergency services.);
- Check for refrigeration leaks before entering confined spaces;
- Switch off and isolate electricity supply;
- If brazing or welding evacuate area if there are any signs of dizziness, etc.;
- Check COSHH statement before carrying out work;
- Use correct personal protective equipment;
- Where needed use correct respirator;
- Shielded and low voltage lighting may reduce risk of burns or electrical shocks.

Safe Working Method

- It is important that when working in a confined space that a third person is aware of your locations;
- Use of safe system of work, this is normally a 'Permit to Work' system;
- Use a lifeline;
- Make sure you have a respirator of the type suitable for the task;
- Make sure the electricity supply in the area is switched off and suitably labelled as such;
- If a refrigerant leak is suspected, leak test prior to entering the area.

Dos and Don'ts of Working in Confined Spaces

Do

- Be aware of the risks that may occur within a confined space;
- Make sure the person doing the work is capable and trained in both the work and the use of any emergency equipment.

Don't

- Work in confined spaces unless it's essential to do so ignore the risks, just because a confined space is safe one day doesn't mean it will always be let others enter a confined space until you are sure it's safe to do so.