



CONFINED SPACE ENTRY

In November of 1993 the Michigan Department of Labor adopted the federal safety standard “Permit-Required Confined Spaces” (Title 29 Code Of Federal Regulations Part 1910.146). The purpose of this standard is to protect employees from the special hazards presented by confined spaces such as entrapment, engulfment and hazardous atmospheric conditions.

A confined space has limited or restricted means of entry or exit, is large enough for an employee to enter and perform assigned work, and is not designed for continuous occupancy by the employee. These spaces may include, but are not limited to, underground vaults, tanks, storage bins, crawl spaces, vessels and silos. Work in a confined space requires additional caution and preferably a second person to assist.

The State standard sets special requirements for “Permit Required Confined Spaces”. A permit-required confined space is one that meets the definition of a confined space and has one or more of these characteristics: (1) it contains or has the potential to contain a hazardous atmosphere; (2) it contains material that has the potential for engulfing an entrant; (3) it 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; and/or (4) it contains any other recognized serious safety or health hazard.

In general, the standard requires employers to evaluate the workplace to determine if spaces are permit-required confined spaces. If there are permit spaces in the workplace, the employer must inform exposed employees of the existence, location, and danger posed by the spaces. This can be accomplished by posting danger signs or by another equally effective means. A sign reading “DANGER - PERMIT - REQUIRED CONFINED SPACE, DO NOT ENTER” or using other similar language would satisfy the requirement for a sign.

If employees are not to enter and work in permit spaces, employers must take effective action to prevent them from entering the permit spaces. One way to accomplish this is to padlock or block off the access to the confined space.

If employees are to enter permit spaces, the employer must develop and implement a written permit space program, which must be made available to employees or their representatives.

We believe that it is beyond the resources of our units to develop and implement a permit space program which meets the State requirements. We recommend that our locations call a contractor to do any work in permit-required confined spaces.