

WORKING IN CONFINED SPACES

The government has strengthened regulations for working in confined spaces, improving consistency among sector regulations, and expanding the number of workers and workplaces covered by specific confined space requirements, effective September 30, 2006.

Confined Spaces

A “confined space” is a fully or partially enclosed space that is not designed or constructed for continuous human occupancy, and in which atmospheric hazards may occur. These include a buildup of hazardous gases or dust, or lack of oxygen, that could result in an immediate life-threatening hazard such as suffocation, fire or explosion.

Examples of confined spaces include storage tanks, compartments of ships, process vessels, pits, vats, boilers and sewers.

Without a proper written program, plan and procedures in place, and without proper training, workers in a confined space, and those who attempt a rescue in an emergency, could quickly be overcome by atmospheric conditions, resulting in injury or death.

Protection for workers in confined spaces

There have been confined space requirements in four sector regulations under the Occupational Health and Safety Act – industrial, construction, mining and health care. However, some sectors and workplaces with confined spaces have not been covered by any of these four sector regulations, including transportation and municipal maintenance workers. With these changes, the original four sector regulations will be updated and many workers not previously covered by a sector regulation will be covered by the new confined spaces regulation.

Prior to these new requirements, employers in workplaces not covered by the sector regulations were still responsible for the general health and safety of workers, and were required to take precautions to protect their workers entering confined spaces. However, they were not covered by any specific regulation, which guides them in what they are required to do, including training, hazard assessment and on-site rescue procedures. As well, in the existing four sector regulations, many steps necessary for pre-entry and protection of workers during entry needed to be clarified, updated or strengthened.

The Ministry of Labour has extensively consulted with stakeholders on proposed enhanced regulations that set out clear, defined requirements for all workplaces with confined spaces. The

additional clarity provided by confined space regulations has now been extended to more workers in Ontario covered by the Occupational Health and Safety Act – not just those in the industrial, construction, mining and health care sectors – working in or near a confined space.

The changes enhance protections for workers by requiring:

- The development of a written assessment that identifies hazards inherent to the confined space or that may arise from work to be done in the space
- The development of a plan that includes procedures on how work will be done safely, and controls to address hazards identified in the assessment
- Training on confined space hazards and safety precautions
- An entry permit identifying hazards and precautions be issued and available to persons prior to entering or working around a confined space
- On-site rescue procedures and equipment are in place and ready for immediate implementation
- Other precautions are present to control substances and situations that may endanger a worker.

For more information on the new regulation, see the Ministry of Labour website at www.labour.gov.on.ca or call your nearest Ministry of Labour office, listed in the Blue Pages.

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To review the consolidated Confined Space regulation please visit:
http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/DBLaws/Regs/English/050632_e.htm

Please write to the following e-mail address to request a copy of the Confined Space guideline when it is completed : mol.publications@mol.gov.on.ca

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