Toolbox Talks are intended to facilitate health and safety discussions on the job site. For additional Toolbox Talks, please visit SAFETY.CAT.COM™.

TOPIC: Confined Spaces

Be Aware

– A confined space is any enclosed space where there is a risk of death or serious injury from hazardous substances or dangerous conditions (e.g., lack of oxygen).
– Some are easy to identify (storage tanks, silos, enclosed drains, sewers, etc). Others are less obvious, but equally dangerous (open-topped chambers, vats, furnace combustion chambers, ductwork, and unventilated or poorly ventilated rooms).

The Dangers

– Lack of oxygen.
– Poisonous gas, fumes or vapors.
– The unexpected rush of liquids, gases or solids into a space.
– Fire and explosions (from flammable vapors, excess oxygen, etc).
– High concentrations of dust.
– Extreme heat leading to dangerous increases in body temperature.

Safety Tips

– Can the work be done another way? Work-planning or a different approach can often reduce the need for confined space working.
– Make use of safe systems for working inside such spaces.
– Ensure the entrance is large enough for rescue workers to quickly access a worker in need.
– Harness workers to lifelines running to the outside of the space.
– Improve ventilation with additional holes or vents. Mechanical ventilation may be necessary to ensure an adequate supply of fresh air.
– Use non-sparking tools and specially protected lighting where flammable or potentially explosive atmospheres are likely.
– Do not try to sweeten the air in a confined space with oxygen. This can greatly increase the risk of a fire or explosion.

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