

Confined space deaths: what employers must know

Jan 15, 2019



The NSW Government is urging employers to do more to protect employees that work in confined spaces following several tragedies in 2018.

A number of fatalities last year are currently being investigated by SafeWork NSW. According to SafeWork NSW, risks in confined spaces include a lack of oxygen, explosions, airborne contaminants, flood waters, sewerage, smoke and dirt.

SafeWork investigations

SafeWork is currently investigating two deaths in confined spaces. In May, a 28-year-old man and a 35-year-old man died in an incident at a paper mill at Ettamogah. Initial inquiries indicate the men were working in the basement area of the mill when they were overcome by Hydrogen Sulphide gas and collapsed.



confined space and ensure there is safety equipment at hand including a safety harness, lifting equipment and a lifeline rope.

“Small spaces like silos, chimneys, tunnels and tanks are not designed to be worked in regularly, but sometimes they need to be accessed for cleaning, maintenance or repairs,” Mr Kean said. “This can quickly become dangerous if oxygen levels deplete and air quality is polluted by chemicals or other fumes.”

Regulations in NSW

NSW's [Work Health and Safety Regulation 2017](#) covers regulations relating to confined spaces that are either designed to be entered or could be entered inadvertently.

An employer cannot direct a worker to enter confined space without a confined space entry permit. Permits must specify the space, the names of the people permitted to enter it and risk control measures. There must also be appropriate signage before operation commences.

While a worker is inside a confined space they must have continuous communication with a worker outside the space.

Anyone involved in the creation of a confined space (eg designer, contractor, supplier etc) has a duty to eliminate or minimise risk by either eliminating or minimising the need for a worker to enter the confined space. The confined space must also have a safe entry and exit.

Anyone conducting business has a responsibility to ensure no worker enters the confined space until the space meets these requirements. They must also ensure a risk assessment is conducted on the confined space. The risk assessment must be recorded in writing.

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Tell us a little about your background? I grew up in Italy and moved to the UK when I was 8 years old. My dad still lives in Italy, and I visit him frequently, I have always loved having two

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