

The **Nine Best Practices** for a Successful Confined Space Entry



By signing an entry permit, remember that you are giving the green light for people to work in dangerous places. If an accident occurs during confined space entry, the responsibility falls on you. Follow these best practices to insure your workers have a safe, successful entry:

1. Confined space entry is potentially dangerous. But, if you and your team know all the exposures and seriously prepare accordingly, it can be one of the safest tasks you perform.
2. Take the time to train a competent team. Too often I have seen basic confined space training provided in a tight time frame to meet a deadline. This poses an unnecessary risk to your team.
3. Commit to working as a team. Every team member has an important role to play that is interdependent on the others. Putting the team at risk, by not following the rules, cannot be tolerated.
4. Everyone involved in the entry should have the necessary skills to perform and document a detailed confined space hazard assessment. When entering spaces they have never been in before, everyone on the entry team should either work from pre-established assessments or contribute to one being done just prior to entering the space.
5. Do not do the entry unless the team has all the gear they need and everyone knows how it works. Have an entry equipment maintenance program and cross train your team on inspections.
6. Generate entry permits containing key data from your hazard assessments. I have used a tool for years that prints space-specific entry permits containing key information from the hazard assessment. The permit includes information like required entry equipment and PPE, lockout guidance, known contaminants, pre-determined communication and emergency protocols, as well as a reference I.D. to the full hazard assessment with a check-off step that says it has been reviewed. It's important that this information is available and known by you and your team to help ensure safety.
7. You must review the hazard assessment and fully appreciate what you are asking your people to do before signing an entry permit. Never assume the work is being done safely without verifying actual conditions.

8. Have a rock-solid rescue plan. Safe and successful operations rely on administrative controls (i.e. correct human behavior) and PPE. Regardless of their skills and preparation, train your team to shift into rescue mode when necessary. This always requires more people than were involved in the initial entry operation. Where are your additional responders coming from? What is the rescue plan? Those details should be part of the original hazard assessment.
9. Use local fire/EMS for medical care only in case they don't have confined space rescue capability. When local fire/EMS do have confined space experience, it is often limited. Plus, by the time they arrive and get set up, the situation will likely have gone from bad to worse.

As an entry supervisor, this is ALL your responsibility. You must know that your team is properly prepared and equipped to run the entry safely and that they can deal with problems that may suddenly arise. If you don't have that confidence, you need to campaign for what you need to improve the process. If you know your team is not ready, or if you are unsure if your team is ready, you must NOT sign the confined space entry permit.

About the Author

Todd Grover is the Global Sr. Manager for Applied Safety Solutions at The Master Lock Company. He has more than 30 years experience as a practicing safety professional and EHS Manager across a wide range of industries. He is a participating member of the ANSI Z244.1 committee on Control of Hazardous Energy, as well as a delegate to the U.S. PC283 committee contributing to the upcoming ISO 45001 Global Standard for Occupational Health and Safety.