

Confined Spaces

OSHA (29 FR 1910.146(b) defines a permit-required confined space as:
"a confined space that has one or more of the following characteristics:

- (1) Contains or has a potential to contain a hazardous atmosphere;
- (2) Contains a material that has the potential for engulfing an entrant;
- (3) Has an internal configuration such that an entrant could be trapped or asphyxiated by inwardly converging walls or by a floor which slopes downward and tapers to a smaller cross-section; or
- (4) Contains any other recognized serious safety or health hazard."

OPNAVINST 5100.23E Chapter 27 addresses confined spaces and provide Navy policies in working with confined spaces.

Medical aspects of confined spaces.

Because of the hazards involved in confined spaces, medical surveillance and job certifications must be tailored to each specific type of confined space.

Review the confined spaces for potential hazardous exposures and determine the appropriate medical surveillance programs necessary for the hazards.

Review the physical requirements of the job to determine the appropriate job certification protocols necessary. Physical agility such and climbing, crawling, etc. as well as the use of respirators (including the specific type of respirator needed) are frequently necessary to complete the medical evaluation.

Medical protocols depend upon the type of confined space and the hazards involved. Occupational Medicine must put together the appropriate medical protocols to evaluate the workers. The PCMATRIX serves as a basis for medical protocols relating to confined spaces.

Some occupational medicine units have standardized specific confined spaces medical evaluations on their bases because of the stability of the spaces in regards to hazards and physical requirements. After they reviewed the physical requirements and hazards with IH, safety and supervisors they determined the most appropriate medical protocols and use PCMATRIX to document the evaluation in the health record.

Because of the high risk of working in confined spaces an additional medical component of confined spaces is the need to be prepared to respond to emergency situations promptly. Knowledge of the hazards and working conditions along with medical response plans is key to proper medical care and guidance to workers in times of emergencies.