

Knowing What to do in an Emergency

Fatality File



Confined spaces can be deadly: On average 2 workers will not come home this week.

(FOREST GROVE, Ore.) Fire officials say one person died and a second was successfully rescued today, after they became trapped in the confined space of an underground manhole on NW Timmerman Road west of Forest Grove. This recent headline could have been taken from just about any newspaper during any given week around the country in 2009. According to data collected by the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL), Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries (CFOI) program, fatal injuries in confined spaces averages 92 fatalities per year. That's almost two per week. According to OSHA, over 4.8 million confined space entries are made every year in the United States, and over 11,000 injuries that occur could be prevented if employers and workers had simply followed the procedures outlined under 29 CFR 1910.146.

The causes of most confined space entry incidents are simple; employers and workers fail to recognize and control the hazards associated with confined spaces, and they conduct inadequate or incorrect emergency response, resulting in the death of the initial entrant, the would-be rescuer or both. Pre-planning for confined space entry should include all parties involved and should serve the purpose of reviewing entry procedures as well as covering specific hazards inherent to the spaces being entered.

Confined spaces can be deadly because of the potential for engulfment, oxygen deficiency, oxygen enrichment, flammable gases or vapors, combustible dusts, toxic substances, and other physical hazards. Other health hazards that could impact employee safety include electrical equipment, mechanical equipment, poor visibility, biohazards, claustrophobia, noise, radiation, and temperature.