

Contributors



Andrew Tzembelicos

Vancouver writer Andrew Tzembelicos gets a firsthand look at the issues facing today's health care workers in our cover story (page 7).



Gail Johnson

In this Work Science story, Gail Johnson looks into research that aims to put return-to-work research into the hands of employers who need it (page 16).



Don Hauka

Tired of hearing the noisy beep beep of a reversing vehicle? Writer Don Hauka, explores the use of broadband alarms in our Safety Spotlight story (page 13).



Susan Kerschbaumer

In this issue's WorkSafe update, Victoria-based writer Susan Kerschbaumer speaks with WorkSafeBC industry specialist Helen Chandler on the issues facing today's youth workers (page 19).

Ask an Officer

Confined spaces pose extreme risk in agriculture



Richard Duguay

WorkSafeBC senior regional officer

Region: Kamloops

Years on the job: 27

This month we talked with WorkSafeBC senior regional officer Richard Duguay, who works with our provincial confined space entry initiative team, about the hazards of confined spaces in agriculture.

Q. What are confined spaces, and why are they so dangerous?

A. Just about every agricultural property has its own unique confined space. Silos, manure storage ponds, and milk tanks are a few common examples.

A confined space meets three criteria:

- It's an enclosed or partially enclosed area that is big enough for a worker to enter. The worker's whole body doesn't have to go inside; even if his head and shoulders can enter, it can be a confined space.
- There is limited or restricted means for entry or exit.
- It's not designed for someone to work in regularly. Entry is often only needed for things like inspection, cleaning, maintenance, or repair.

Quite often, when an incident occurs in a confined space, it's catastrophic. Lack of oxygen is a leading cause of death for B.C. workers in confined spaces. Harmful air contaminants, gases, moving parts or equipment, explosive gases and vapours, and extreme temperatures are some of the other hazards that could seriously harm people.

Q. I work on a farm. How do I know where the confined spaces are?

A. Your employer is required to identify all the confined spaces at your worksite, to determine which ones will be entered by workers, and to post warning signs at each confined space. There may be some confined spaces your employer doesn't know about. In that case, be sure to tell a supervisor if you come across one.

Your employer is also responsible for instructing and training you on how to safely enter and exit a confined space. Don't ever enter one unless you have been properly trained. You have the right to refuse unsafe work.

Be sure to review our new guide, *Management of Confined Spaces in Agriculture: A Handbook for Workers*. It's available at worksafebc.com in several languages.

Q. I am an employer. How can I make confined spaces safer for my workers?

A. Hazard assessment is the key. Look for the hazards that could harm workers, and then take steps to reduce each risk.

For example, if you work in irrigation and have valves in a confined space that workers need to access, can the valves be moved outside? Can you make the opening to the space larger, or install stairs? Change your work processes, if you can, to reduce the need and time for workers to be in the confined space. For example, have workers clean as best they can from outside the area before entering it to finish the job.

Your basic confined space safety plan needs to cover equipment lockout, air testing, ventilation, standby persons, use of personal protective equipment, isolation of adjacent piping, and rescue.

Q. What gets commonly overlooked in confined space entry procedures?

A. How you get a worker out of the space if there's a problem is an important part of your rescue plan. You can't always rely on emergency personnel, because they may not be able to respond immediately, or have the right training or equipment.

So, you need to have a plan for a rescue. If there is an emergency, no one should enter a confined

“You need to have a plan for a rescue. If there is an emergency, no one should enter a confined space unless trained and equipped to do so.”

—Richard Duguay, WorkSafeBC senior regional officer

space unless trained and equipped to do so. Always have a person on standby outside the confined space. If rescue can't be performed outside the space by using lifting equipment, then a rescue team must be outside the space in addition to the standby person. They must be equipped and capable of effecting rescue. Depending on the hazard assessment, the rescue team could be required to use a respirator such as a self-contained breathing apparatus. Have the team conduct annual drills.

Q. Where can I get more information on safety in confined spaces?

A. You'll find free resources at:

- worksafebc.com (search for “confined spaces in agriculture”)
Materials include publications for specific types of agriculture such as berry farms, ranches, greenhouses, etc. There's also a training resource for employers.
- agsafebc.ca
AgSafe (formerly FARSHA) offers publications and advice.

Looking for answers to your specific health and safety questions? Send them to us at worksafemagazine@worksafebc.com, and we'll consider them for our next Ask an Officer feature. ☺

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