Management of confined spaces in agriculture

Greenhouses, nurseries, and floriculture

FARSHA

WorkSafeBC

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Introduction

This booklet is a tool to help farmers identify and manage confined spaces on greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture operations. Workers have lost their lives because they didn't know they were entering a confined space that contained hazards and didn't take necessary precautions.

Confined spaces such as tanks and storage bins can be dangerous to workers and others who may be exposed to toxic gases and other hazards that may be present in these spaces. On your farm, it's important to identify these spaces and ensure that no one enters them until proper planning and procedures are in place.

How this booklet is organized

Part A: Confined spaces and hazards describes what a confined space is and the types of hazards that may be present in confined spaces on farm operations.

Part B: Managing confined spaces describes five basic steps you need to follow to address confined spaces on your farm:

1. Identify all the confined spaces on your farm.
2. Post warning signs outside confined spaces, and seal or lock them to prevent anyone from entering.
3. Ensure that a qualified person determines the hazards for each space.
4. Communicate with your workers about the locations of confined spaces and the hazards that are present.
5. Determine which spaces may need to be entered.

Part C: Preparing to work in confined spaces briefly describes the complex requirements that are involved with confined space entry, including the following:

- Confined space entry procedures
- Standby persons and rescue personnel
- Lockout and isolation
- Air testing
- Ventilation

You'll need the help of a qualified person to address many of the issues described in Part C.

Part A: Confined spaces and hazards

Why confined spaces are a concern

Confined spaces are enclosed or partially enclosed areas big enough for workers to enter. Since 2000, 18 workers have lost their lives in confined spaces in British Columbia. Incidents in confined spaces are rare, but when they do occur the consequences can far outweigh the size of the error. Confined space incidents can happen suddenly, often without any warning that something is wrong. Afterwards, conditions in the space can rapidly return to normal.

Incidents involving atmospheric hazards (for example, toxic gases or a lack of oxygen) in confined spaces are very dangerous. Often, they can cause serious injury or death to more than one worker.

Typically, confined space incidents happen when:

- Confined spaces are being prepared for entry
- Workers or others are entering the confined space
- Work is happening in the confined space

Previous incidents in this industry are sober reminders of why it's important that workers have proper knowledge of potential hazards and safe work procedures for confined spaces. The following tragic incidents are examples of what can happen when knowledge and procedures are lacking. By learning from these and other past incidents, as an employer you can help ensure your workers stay safe on the job.

Brown-water cistern

Pump shed

Composting pond

Incident at mushroom composting facility kills three workers

In September 2008, three men died and another two were permanently injured in a pump shed on a mushroom farm in Langley. Three of the men were trying to clear a blocked intake pipe in the shed. When the pipe was disconnected, one worker complained of a strange smell and then collapsed. A second worker remained in the shed with the unconscious worker while the supervisor went for help. Before emergency services arrived, several other workers entered the shed to help.

When the ambulance and fire crews arrived at the site, they found the supervisor outside the pump shed, disoriented and in respiratory distress. Five other workers were recovered from inside the shed. Three workers suffered fatal injuries and two suffered severe and permanent brain injuries from exposure to the toxic atmosphere.

What went wrong? The mushroom farm didn't have a health and safety program or a confined space program. Workers entered the space to rescue their fellow workers without any training or safety equipment. The pump shed had also not been identified as a confined space, so the workers didn't recognize that it might contain a hazardous atmosphere.

Winery incident kills two workers

In November 2002, two Okanagan winemakers died in a wine fermentation tank with low oxygen levels. One worker, standing on a ladder above the hatch of the tank, may have inhaled a high concentration of carbon dioxide gas (a by-product of fermentation) when the hatch was opened. He then lost consciousness and slumped into the chilled liquid in the tank. A fellow worker tried rescuing him but also died after he leaned into the hatch. Two people working nearby recalled hearing the second man say he couldn't breathe. Emergency rescuers tried draining the liquid from the tank and cutting it apart, but it was too late.

Dairy farm tragedy claims five in the US

In 2007, four family members and a worker died from exposure to hydrogen sulfide gas in a manure pit on a dairy farm. A dairy farmer was transferring liquid manure from a small pit to a larger one when the transfer pipe became blocked. After entering the small pit to clear the blockage, he collapsed from being exposed to hydrogen sulfide gas in the pit. Another worker then climbed into the pit to help the farmer but was also overcome by the deadly gas. The farmer's wife and two daughters then entered the pit and were also overcome by the gas. First responders to the scene were unable to revive the victims.

What is a confined space?

A confined space is an enclosed or partially enclosed area that's big enough for a worker to enter. The space may be enclosed on all sides (for example, a tank or manure pit) or as few as two sides (for example, an enclosed conveyor). Confined spaces can be hazardous to enter.

Confined spaces may not always be obvious. Some are large, while others are small. Some are open on top, while others are completely enclosed except for an access opening.

Confined spaces don't have features commonly found in areas intended for regular work, such as:

- Permanent utilities (e.g., ventilation systems, lighting, and plumbing services)
- Wall coverings and furniture
- Easy access (e.g., large doorways and shallow staircases)

Though confined spaces are not designed for someone to work in regularly, occasional entry may be necessary for inspection, cleaning, maintenance, or repairs.

Small openings, hatchways that open at the top, or an interior layout with obstructions can make first aid, rescue, and evacuation difficult. If the space is too small or difficult to move in, a first aid provider may not be able to provide treatment. Preparing an injured worker for transport could also be a problem if a worker needs to be tilted on a stretcher or lifted out of the space using a harness and lifeline.

Workers must not be allowed to enter confined spaces unless proper training, equipment, and procedures are in place. A worker is considered to have entered a confined space just by reaching into or putting his or her head into the opening. If the confined space contains toxic gases, even workers near the opening may be at risk of injury or death.

Typical confined spaces in agriculture

Gas-fired boilers

Stormwater manhole

Open-topped tank

Hazards in confined spaces

Many types of hazards can be found in confined spaces. A confined space may contain a hazardous atmosphere, such as insufficient oxygen, toxic (poisonous) air, or an explosive atmosphere. Confined spaces may also have physical hazards that could crush or bury workers, or cause them to fall or drown. Hazards may not be obvious, so a qualified person must carefully assess every confined space on your farm to identify potential hazards.

What are the typical hazards found in confined spaces?

Oxygen – too little or too much

Lack of oxygen is a leading cause of death for workers entering confined spaces. Low oxygen levels cannot be detected by sight or smell. A very low oxygen level can cause brain damage and stop your heart after a few minutes. In a confined space, something as simple as rusting metal can cause low oxygen levels.

Too much oxygen in a confined space is also dangerous because it greatly increases the risk of fire or explosion. Materials that would not catch fire or burn in normal air may do so extremely quickly and easily where there's a high level of oxygen.

Toxic gases

Toxic gases and vapours can be released in a confined space through:

- Gases or liquids already present in the confined space
- Migration into the space from the surrounding soil
- Evaporation from surfaces within the space (e.g., after cleaning or applying waterproof coatings)
- Work activities, such as painting or welding

The following table describes some of the toxic gases that may be present in confined spaces on greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture operations and the dangers of exposure to these gases.

Contaminant	Where does it come from?	What are the dangers?
Hydrogen sulfide (H_2S)	Released when organic material breaks down without oxygen (e.g., in tanks, lift stations, or crawl spaces).	• Very toxic – causes lung failure and death • Extremely flammable • Can be released when fluids containing trapped gas are agitated • Heavier than air – may accumulate at the bottom of the confined space
Ammonia (NH_3)	Produced when waste organic material is decomposed by bacteria (e.g., in tunnels or sanitary systems).	• Toxic – causes irritation to the eyes, nose, and lungs; can cause lung damage and death at higher concentrations • Flammable at high concentrations • Lighter than air – may accumulate at the top of the confined space
Methane (CH_4)	The principal gas produced during the bacterial digestion of organic material (e.g., in pump/lift stations or sumps).	• Accumulates in areas lacking ventilation • Displaces oxygen • Flammable and explosive • Lighter than air – may accumulate at the top of the confined space
Carbon monoxide (CO)	Comes from sources of combustion (e.g., burners or gasoline or diesel engines).	• Toxic – can cause suffocation; replaces oxygen in red blood cells • May accumulate at the bottom of the confined space in cool weather
Carbon dioxide (CO_2)	Produced by combustion and all living organisms that breathe oxygen. Levels may be high in spaces such as pump/lift stations, sanitary systems, or well pits.	• Displaces oxygen • Toxic • Heavier than air – may accumulate at the bottom of the confined space

Without careful and thorough assessment of hazardous conditions and preparation to create safe work conditions, entering a confined space can be extremely hazardous, causing serious injury and even death. Taking the proper precautions is critical; otherwise, the risks are just too great.

For more information on confined space hazards, see the WorkSafeBC publication *Hazards of Confined Spaces*.

At concentrations considerably above normal levels, some substances become immediately dangerous to life and health (IDLH). At these levels, even a brief exposure can have a permanent effect on a worker's health, such as causing brain, heart, or lung damage. Workers may become dizzy or unconscious and unable to escape from the confined space. Some substances have very low IDLH levels, which means even a small amount can be hazardous. For example, the IDLH level for hydrogen sulfide is only 100 parts per million (ppm).

Ignitable and explosive atmospheres

Gases or vapours that have accumulated to dangerous levels in confined spaces can ignite and cause fires or explosions. This may happen when volatile substances are spilled or applied to large surface areas (for example, when painting) and there is a lack of appropriate ventilation. Fuels such as gasoline and propane are especially hazardous. Propane or similar substances may also be ingredients in propellants used in many aerosol products.

In some cases, dust from organic materials, such as grain, can be ignited (for example, by an electric arc in a switch or motor), resulting in a highly destructive fire or explosion.

Biological agents

Composted material, manure, grain, and feed can release bacteria, mould spores, allergens, and other bioaerosols into the air. At lower concentrations, workers may show mild symptoms, such as coughing, itchy eyes, stuffy nose, sneezing, and sore throat. For those with asthma or a sensitized immune system, the health effects can be severe. At high concentrations, most people will react to the presence of bioaerosols. Some bacteria and moulds can infect the lungs or open wounds.

Entrapment and engulfment

Grain or compost stored in enclosures can present entrapment and engulfment hazards.

Entrapment usually occurs inside enclosures with inward-sloping sides and slippery interior surfaces, such as storage bins. The worker slides to the bottom, can't get out, and is at risk of other hazards in the space – such as toxic gas or a low oxygen level.

Engulfment occurs when a worker is surrounded, covered, or trapped by liquids or very fine solids, such as grain. Solids, particularly if moist, can form “bridges” with empty spaces underneath them or “shoulders” that are overhead. If a worker walks on the surface of a bridge or underneath a shoulder, it may collapse and engulf the worker in the material. This can happen in seconds.

Bins and hoppers with conveyors or augers are especially dangerous. A worker may be trapped or crushed when material is accidentally discharged into an empty bin or hopper. The design of these confined spaces may increase the risk. For example, in an empty hopper with a floor that slopes steeply to a vertical chute, a worker can slide into the chute and get trapped.

Equipment and machinery

Mechanical equipment (for example, augers, mixers, conveyors, or rotating tanks) can be dangerous to work around – even when the equipment is shut off. For example, someone else could accidentally turn the machine on, or there could be remaining energy, such as accumulated pressure, in equipment if it’s not locked out and de-energized. Even if the equipment is locked out and power is off, unsecured equipment can move, especially if it’s out of balance.

Electrical equipment powers hydraulic and pneumatic power sources. Shutdown of an electric drive motor does not necessarily eliminate energy stored as pressure in the fluid circuits of hydraulic and pneumatic (air-driven) systems.

Electrical shock

Defective extension cords, welding cables, or other electrical equipment can result in electrical shock. Work done in metal enclosures or wet conditions can be especially dangerous. If there’s a danger of electrical shock, install ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) or use assured grounding.

When solid materials (for example, dry grain, feed, or seed) flow or move through pipes, augers, or hoppers, dry conditions can create electrostatic arcs. These can ignite dust clouds and cause an explosion.

Substances entering through piping

Some confined spaces use piping to connect to sources of supply and drainage of chemical products, sewer lines, vents, and emergency relief systems. Piping may contain liquids, gases, or other harmful substances, including:

- Toxic gases
- Hot substances that could burn a worker (e.g., steam)
- Liquids that could drown a worker (e.g., milk or liquid manure)
- Solids that could trap, crush, or bury a worker (e.g., grain or feed)

Piping must be isolated to prevent substances from entering a confined space through the piping. This often involves disconnecting the piping or using solid plates to block off the piping from the confined space.

Temperature extremes

Some confined spaces have temperatures considerably higher than normal levels. Heat stress (hyperthermia) occurs when the core temperature of the body exceeds 38°C. Heat stress can produce sweating, muscle weakness, cramps, fatigue, thirst, and, in severe situations, heat stroke. Untreated heat stroke can lead to death. Allow enough time for cooling of confined spaces that have been steam cleaned.

If workers are exposed to low temperatures, cold stress (hypothermia) may result. Shivering is a common symptom. A ventilation system in a confined space can add to this problem because it makes the body lose heat faster.

Before workers enter confined spaces, such as boilers, reaction vessels, and low-temperature systems, a qualified person must provide safe work procedures.

Noise

Noise in confined spaces can be particularly harmful because it can reflect off the walls. If noise levels cannot be reduced, workers must wear hearing protection. Noise may also make communication difficult, especially between workers in the confined space and the standby persons outside.

Immersion and drowning

Immersion occurs when fluid such as gas, vapour, or liquid rapidly enters a space and surrounds a worker. This can happen when valves are opened or piping and piping components fail. Rapid flooding can also occur. A worker who is unconscious on the floor of the structure can drown in as little as 15 cm of liquid. Confined spaces should be fully drained and dry before entry to prevent drowning. Workers have drowned in small pools of liquid after being knocked out by lack of oxygen, a toxic gas, or a blow to the head.

Part B: Managing confined spaces

Step 1: Identify confined spaces

Confined spaces commonly found at greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture operations include:

- Boilers
- Fuel tanks
- Closed tanks
- Open-topped tanks
- Well pits
- Pump/lift stations
- Valve boxes
- Sumps and stormwater manholes
- Sanitary collection systems
- Crawl spaces and cellars

What is considered a confined space?

A space is classified as a confined space if it meets all four of the following criteria:

1. The space is enclosed or partially enclosed.
2. The space is not designed or intended for continuous human occupancy.
3. The space has limited or restricted means for entry or exit that may complicate the provision of first aid, evacuation, rescue, or other emergency response services.
4. The space is large enough and so configured that a worker could enter to perform assigned work.

Determining whether or not a space is a confined space is not always easy. For example, hopper-bottomed bins are usually considered to be confined spaces, while flat-bottomed bins normally are not.

Hopper-bottomed bins meet the four criteria of a confined space. Usually, the only entry is through a small hatch at the top. Once inside, there's no internal ladder to allow a safe descent, and the sharply sloping bottom walls lead directly to the auger intake. Worker contact with the auger is a potential hazard.

Flat-bottomed bins generally don't qualify as confined spaces because they usually have a large, door-like entry at ground level, which does not restrict access or exit in an emergency.

A piece of mobile equipment is considered a confined space if it meets the four criteria described above. A qualified person must be the one who determines this.

Mobile equipment

Some pieces of mobile equipment may also be considered confined spaces, depending on their size (for example, whether a worker can get inside) and configuration (for example, whether they have hatches or doors).

Get help from a qualified person

A qualified person is someone who has training and experience in recognizing, assessing, and controlling the hazards of confined spaces.

A qualified person is required for:

- Determining the hazards for each confined space
- Developing safe work procedures before workers enter confined spaces
- Testing the atmosphere in a confined space
- Developing rescue procedures

Though it's not a requirement, a qualified person should help identify confined spaces on your farm.

Step 2: Post warning signs and secure entry to confined spaces

Confined space warning sign

Warning signs

Post signs or notices at confined space entrances prohibiting unauthorized persons from entering. Signs and notices should:

- Be clear, visible, and written in the languages used by your workers
- Clearly state that the area is a confined space and that only authorized people may enter

Many workers don't realize they are entering a confined space. You must ensure that all workers on your farm know about the location of each confined space on the farm.

Secure against entry

Secure points of entry with locks, or fence or guard the area to prevent mistaken or unauthorized entry. Use locks on all covers, portholes, and doors that provide access. A lock may not be required if a cover or lid is bolted in place and requires tools for removal, or if the cover or lid is heavy enough to require tools or equipment to be moved.

Pits or lagoons must have at least a barrier or guardrails around the sides. Lock any gates in the barriers or guardrails. Fill the space between the ground level and the top rail of guardrail systems with heavy mesh fencing or similar material – this will prevent children, pets, and livestock from entering the hazard area through the spaces between the guardrails. Post signs and notices on all gates and at intervals along the perimeter barriers or guardrails so the signs and notices will be visible to anyone approaching the area.

Access points and signs must be inspected regularly (at least monthly) to ensure access points are secure, signs are legible, and visibility is not obstructed by vegetation, materials, or equipment.

Step 3: Determine the hazards for each space

A hazard assessment for each confined space must:

- Consider conditions that may exist before workers enter (e.g., because of the location, configuration, or use of the space)
- Consider conditions that may be present while work is being conducted in the space (e.g., cleaning, painting, or welding)

Typical hazards

The following table lists examples of the types of hazards your workers may encounter.

Hazard	Examples
Oxygen – too little or too much	–
Toxic gases	Hydrogen sulfide, methane, ammonia, or carbon monoxide
Explosive gases and vapours	Methane or gasoline vapours
Biological agents	Mould and bacteria
Physical hazards	Solids or liquids that may engulf, entrap, or drown workers
Moving parts or machinery	Mixers or augers
Hazardous energy	Electric shock
Substances entering through piping	Toxic gases, steam, brown water, or liquid manure
Other hazards	Heat, cold, noise, entrapment, or engulfment

Hazard assessments are required for all confined spaces on your farm. These must be prepared by a qualified person who has training and experience in recognizing, assessing, and controlling confined space hazards. If you don't have this training, you must hire a qualified person to prepare the hazard assessment.

The following general information will help in assessing hazards of confined spaces, though you may have confined spaces on your farm that are not listed here.

Boiler systems (natural gas)

Gas-fired boilers

Natural gas-fired boilers have largely replaced wood-burning boilers in greenhouse operations. Natural gas-fired boilers have a furnace section, tubes, and flues. Draft fans combined with the natural flow through stacks and chimneys can provide ventilation if workers need to enter these spaces.

When there's incomplete combustion, soot containing toxic substances can deposit onto surfaces in the combustion train.

Refractory materials lining the combustion section (including brick, fibrous materials, mortar, and grout) can contain substances that change to crystalline silica after exposure to high temperature. Work involving these materials is very dusty. Refractory materials in older boilers can also contain asbestos.

Before entry to these spaces is allowed, they must be cooled down to ambient temperature.

Hazards

- Crystalline silica (quartz) particles
- Asbestos
- Welding fume and gases
- Hot surfaces
- Extremely hot atmosphere

Hazardous work

- Inspection
- Cleaning
- Removing and repairing refractory materials
- Repairing pipes and tubes
- Welding

Boiler systems (wood)

Wood-fired boiler systems

Wood-burning boiler systems consume waste wood and timber to produce hot water or steam. The system contains several components linked together by ducting.

Raw material passes from chipping equipment into the furnace section. Draft fans help move combustion gases through the boiler to air-cleaning equipment and out the stack. The fan casings are sometimes large enough to enter and work in. The fans combined with the natural flow through the stack can provide ventilation during work in these spaces.

Soot and ash coat the interior surfaces of boiler systems. Ash and clinker drop through the bottom of the furnace into a collecting pit. Depending on the starting material, soot and ash can contain toxic substances.

Refractory materials lining the combustion section (including brick, fibrous materials, mortar, and grout) can contain substances that change to crystalline silica after exposure to high temperature. Work involving these materials is very dusty. Refractory materials in older boilers can also contain asbestos.

Before entry to these spaces is allowed, they must be cooled down to ambient temperature.

Hazards

- Crystalline silica (quartz) particles
- Asbestos
- Welding fume and gases
- Hot surfaces
- Extremely hot atmosphere

Wood-fired boiler system

Hazardous work

- Inspection
- Cleaning
- Removing and repairing refractory materials
- Repairing pipes and tubes
- Welding

Closed tanks

Closed plastic tanks

Closed steel tanks

Closed tanks store plant-nutrition solutions and hot water used for heating. The solution tanks are generally made of plastic. Hot-water tanks are made of carbon steel.

The airspace in these tanks will contain water vapour and volatile substances in the water. Normally, hazardous gases won't be present in these tanks, provided the water is clean.

A slippery biofilm is likely to form on the inside of these tanks. Exposure to micro-organisms in the biofilm can occur during power washing.

Draining the water can lead to the growth of additional organisms on tank surfaces and rust on metal surfaces. Both these processes consume oxygen.

Hazards

- Cleaning chemicals and disinfectants
- Oxygen deficiency
- Bacteria and mould
- Musculoskeletal injury
- Drowning

Hazardous work

- Power washing
- Cleaning interior surfaces
- Maintaining or replacing mechanical parts
- Repairing or modifying pipes and other components

Crawl spaces and cellars

Exterior entrance and crawl space

Crawl spaces or cellars may contain a toxic or low-oxygen atmosphere if there's not enough natural ventilation. Oxygen in the space may be depleted if moisture and metal are present. The oxygen is used up as the metal rusts. Other toxic gases may also accumulate, depending on the use of the building above the crawl space or material being stored in the crawl space.

Hazards

- Hydrogen sulfide (H_2S)
- Carbon dioxide (CO_2)
- Bacteria and mould
- Oxygen deficiency

Hazardous work

- Entering crawl spaces for visual inspections or repairs
- Storing or removing material

Fuel tanks (diesel and bunker fuel)

Above-ground steel fuel tanks

Fuel tanks store diesel fuel for the reliable power system and bunker fuel for the boiler. These tanks are often horizontal, carbon-steel tanks located above ground.

The airspace in these tanks contains residual vapours that may have a low flashpoint (temperature at which a chemical can vaporize and form an ignitable mixture in air) compared to gasoline.

Over time, volatile organic components in diesel fuel, fuel oil, and oil itself will evaporate to form a flammable, explosive mixture in the space, which can be just as deadly as gasoline vapour.

Wet surfaces in the tank are also likely to be very slippery.

Hazards

- Fuel vapour
- Oxygen deficiency
- Welding fume and gases
- Hot surfaces
- Heat stress (in summer)
- Musculoskeletal injury

Hazardous work

- Inspection
- Cleaning
- Repairing pipes
- Welding

Open-topped tanks and structures

Open-topped tanks

Greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture operations usually include steel, plastic-lined, open-topped tanks and in-ground structures for storing rainwater, make-up water from municipal sources, and water recycled from drainage. A biofilm is likely to form on the insides of these structures.

Also, organic debris can land in open-topped tanks, sink to the bottom, and form sludge. As this sludge decays, highly toxic gases can form. These gases are unlikely to be released if the water is clean and the sludge at the bottom of the tank is not disturbed.

However, cleaning and servicing the tanks can disturb sludge. This can release highly toxic gases that can rapidly cause death when inhaled at high concentrations. The use of cleaners and disinfectant products can also be dangerous.

Power washing the insides of the tanks can cause exposure to micro-organisms in the biofilm. The biofilm is also likely to be very slippery.

Hazards

- Cleaning chemicals and disinfectants
- Hydrogen sulfide (H_2S)
- Oxygen deficiency
- Bacteria and mould
- Musculoskeletal injury
- Drowning

Hazardous work

- Inspecting tanks
- Cleaning interior surfaces
- Repairing or modifying pipes and plastic liners

Pump/lift stations

Pump station in a greenhouse

A pump station (also known as a lift station) is a below-ground chamber used to collect drainage from surface and subsurface sources. Pumps move the liquid to a higher level. Higher levels may include the interior of an above-ground storage tank, drainage structure, or sewer.

Pump stations handle drainage from irrigation of the crop. This water contains nutrients and may contain organic debris from root-anchoring products and plant parts. Pump stations may also handle relatively clean water collected from roofs and other sources, and surface drainage for transfer to ditches.

Agitation (stirring, swirling, or aeration) of sludge by the pump can release trapped toxic gases. Agitation thins the fluid and causes bubbles and foam, releasing gas into the air. High concentrations of these gases released into the air can cause death in a few seconds.

Hazards

- Carbon dioxide (CO_2)
- Hydrogen sulfide (H_2S)
- Methane (CH_4)
- Bacteria and mould
- Oxygen deficiency
- Drowning

Hazardous work

- Cleaning equipment
- Unblocking inflow and outflow piping
- Repairing or modifying pipes or other components

Sanitary collection system

Septic tank hatchways

Greenhouse, nursery, and floriculture operations in rural areas aren't part of municipal sanitary collection systems. These operations must have stand-alone sewage treatment facilities, including collection and processing chambers.

Wastewater treatment can result in low oxygen conditions and produce toxic gases in these confined spaces. Inhaling these toxic gases at high concentrations can rapidly cause death.

Hazards

- Carbon dioxide (CO_2)
- Hydrogen sulfide (H_2S)
- Ammonia (NH_3)
- Methane (CH_4)
- Bacteria and mould
- Oxygen deficiency
- Drowning

Hazardous work

- Cleaning
- Repairing and replacing components
- Unblocking outflow pipes

Soil-processing equipment

Soil blender

Peat moss blender

Greenhouses that handle potted plants have mechanical equipment for processing soil and other ingredients used to create potting mixtures.

The interior of this equipment can contain augers, transport conveyors, and rotating equipment. There may also be hydraulic and pneumatically powered components. The enclosure that prevents casual access to moving parts and structures may be considered a confined space.

Potting materials may emit toxic vapours from pesticide residues. When there's enough moisture, gases may also be released by fermentation, decay, or external growth of micro-organisms. Toxic gases generally only build up when the equipment isn't used for a long time.

Hazards

- Pesticide residues
- Carbon dioxide (CO_2)
- Bacteria and mould
- Oxygen deficiency

Hazardous work

- Inspection
- Conducting maintenance or repairs
- Cleaning and removing blockages

Sumps and stormwater manholes

Sump

Stormwater manhole

Sumps are below-ground chambers used to collect drainage from surface and subsurface sources. When the trap in the outflow pipe overflows, collected water is transferred to another location through the outflow pipe. Sumps act as separation chambers before discharging to stormwater drainage. Stormwater manholes serve the same function but may not include the separation capability.

Sumps can accumulate organic matter in runoff from various sources. Sludge can trap gases from anaerobic digestion. Agitation thins the sludge and releases these gases. Fermentation gases are toxic and can rapidly cause death when inhaled at high concentrations.

Hazards

- Carbon dioxide (CO_2)
- Hydrogen sulfide (H_2S)
- Methane (CH_4)
- Oxygen deficiency
- Bacteria and mould
- Drowning

Hazardous work

- Cleaning equipment
- Unblocking inflow and outflow lines
- Repairing or modifying piping

Valve chambers (valve boxes)

Below-ground valve chamber

Valve chambers contain valves used in water management systems. In some operations, valves control how crops are irrigated. Flooded-floor irrigation provides water from below. Drip irrigation provides water from above.

Valve chambers can contain a sump with or without a pump. Organic debris in the water can block the pump inlet or drain. This can cause a buildup of water and sludge in the bottom of the chamber.

Hazards

- Carbon dioxide (CO_2) from sludge
- Hydrogen sulfide (H_2S) from sludge
- Methane (CH_4) from sludge
- Bacteria and mould
- Drowning

	Hazardous work • Cleaning equipment • Opening and closing valves • Repairing or modifying piping
Well pits (potable water)   Well pits	A well pit is the chamber at the top of a wellhead. A chamber located under the floor of a building is considered a confined space. The well pit provides access to the well and pumping equipment. It also prevents freeze-up in the pressure tank and piping. Normally, hazardous gases won't be present in a well provided there's little organic material in the water. However, oxygen depletion can occur when metal rusts. This is most likely when the well pit is closed for a long time and condensation forms on metal surfaces. **Hazards** • Carbon dioxide (CO_2) • Oxygen deficiency **Hazardous work** • Inspection • Cleaning or maintenance • Drowning in water on the floor • Electrocution from faulty, deteriorated, or improper wiring or equipment

Confined spaces inventory

You can use the following table to help complete the inventory of confined spaces on your farm.

Description of confined space
Location
Access/egress (e.g., locations, sizes, and shapes of openings)
Contents of space (e.g., manure, grain, or milk)
Equipment in space (e.g., pumps, augers, or valves)

Function or use of space
Adjacent spaces
External surroundings
Security (e.g., signage, barriers, locks)
Entry required (Yes/No and reason)
Comments

Step 4: Communicate with workers

Educate your workers about confined spaces. Be sure they know what a confined space is, and make it clear that they must not enter any confined spaces without proper training, equipment, and permission.

Ongoing communication with your workers is important because conditions on the farm can change over time and new hazards can develop. Inform your workers about the specific confined spaces on your farm and the hazards those spaces may contain. Explain what the safety signage means and why some spaces have been locked to prevent unauthorized entry.

Another way to encourage communication about confined spaces on your farm is to talk about them during toolbox talks and safety meetings. Ask your workers to tell you if they find new confined spaces or possible hazards.

You should also encourage your workers to tell each other about possible hazards and to watch out for each other. If a worker sees someone entering a confined space without authorization, he or she should stop that person from entering the space or immediately report it to a supervisor.

Step 5: Determine which spaces need to be entered

Contracting out confined space work

Hiring a qualified contractor is a legitimate and acceptable way to ensure worker safety and delegate the requirement for specialized training and equipment. However, you must still ensure contractors are competent to enter and work in confined spaces, and that they're following safe work procedures prepared by a qualified person. Make sure the contractor has a confined space program and safe entry procedures in place before beginning work in the confined space.

The first step of this booklet focused on identifying confined spaces and creating a written inventory of them. Now, you must determine whether or not workers will need to enter any of those spaces to carry out work. Some confined spaces require entry for inspections, maintenance, or repairs. If entry is required, list the reasons why on your inventory.

Making confined spaces safer

The best way to avoid confined space hazards is to find a way to do any necessary work outside the space. The following are a few examples:

- Workers can use a portable vacuum system to remove remaining material from a bin without entering the confined space.
- You may be able to permanently move equipment to a new location outside the confined space.
- It may be possible to realign equipment so it can be removed from the space for repair and then placed back into the space. For example, consider installing a removable agitator system in a manure pond so workers won't have to enter the pond when repairs are necessary.

If it's absolutely necessary to work inside the confined space, look for ways to make it safer. Can the space be modified? For example, can you enlarge the opening? If the space can only be accessed from the top, can you install another opening at the bottom?

Before a confined space is ready for entry, you must prepare and implement a confined space program that includes safe entry and work procedures.

Part C: Preparing to work in confined spaces

Confined space entry procedures

If you or your workers have to enter a confined space, you must develop and implement a confined space entry program and safe entry procedures. These procedures may be simple or complex, depending on the:

- Nature of the confined space (e.g., how difficult it is to get in and out)
- Types of hazards
- Type of work to be performed (e.g., welding or painting within the space will introduce additional hazards)

A qualified person must write procedures specific to each confined space. These procedures will take into account the conditions in the space before entry, as well as the work activities that will take place inside the space. Workers must be educated and trained (hands-on training) in these entry procedures.

What to include in procedures

Your confined space entry procedures must include:

- Lockout and isolation procedures
- Cleaning procedures, if required
- Air testing requirements for pre-entry and for work being conducted in the space
- Ventilation procedures
- Assignment of a standby person
- Description and use of personal protective equipment (PPE) and any other necessary equipment (e.g., equipment required for entry and exit)
- Rescue procedures
- Coordination of work activities

Confined space entry procedures must also include a confined space entry permit if:

- Work will take place in high-hazard atmospheres
- Lockout or isolation is required
- There's a hazard of entrapment or engulfment

Standby persons and rescue personnel

Standby persons

All confined space entries must have a standby person stationed at or near the entrance to the space. In some cases, more than one standby person may be required, such as if more than one entrance is used by workers in the space. The standby person will maintain communication with the workers in the space and respond to an emergency situation by taking appropriate action, such as summoning confined space rescue personnel.

Rescue personnel

A dedicated rescue team must be available on site for any confined space entry. It may consist of workers on the farm or a subcontracted, qualified rescue services provider. In either case, written rescue procedures for confined spaces must be prepared by a qualified person.

If in-house rescue team members are used, they must be specifically trained for confined space rescue. Training must include practical, hands-on rescue scenarios. Rescue team members must also conduct drills on an annual basis.

Rescue personnel must be stationed at the entrance to the confined space and be properly equipped and capable of entering the space if a rescue is necessary. Do not rely on 911 to provide rescue services. As the employer, you're required to pre-arrange any rescue services.

Lockout and isolation

If a confined space entry is necessary, hazards must be isolated and controlled. Workers must be protected from hazardous energy (electrical, hydraulic, and mechanical) and harmful substances (solids, liquids, gases, and vapours) that could be discharged from pipes or conduits beside or leading to the confined space. Product sources, energy sources, and controls for pumps, motors, and other moving equipment must be locked out (for example, by attaching locks to switches and valves) or isolated (for example, by disconnecting piping or inserting a blank or blind in the piping).

Physical locks are generally used to prevent machinery or equipment from accidentally starting up or moving. Applying a personal lock is important for ensuring the device controlling the energy or other hazard remains in the off position.

Shutdown, lockout, and isolation points will be different for each confined space and activity. A written procedure must be created and followed for lockout and isolation. Each isolation point must be visually checked before a worker enters a confined space.

In addition to specialized confined space entry training, workers involved in confined space entries must receive training, instruction, and information regarding lockout and isolation.

Air testing

Before a worker enters a confined space, the atmosphere must be tested in accordance with written procedures developed by a qualified person. Exposure to explosive gases, toxic gases, or an oxygen-deficient atmosphere can cause serious injury, illness, or death.

Gas monitors contain sensors that detect specific toxic gases (for example, ammonia, carbon monoxide, hydrogen sulfide, and nitrogen dioxide), as well as oxygen-deficient and explosive atmospheres. Testing must be conducted within the confined space before it's ventilated and at least 20 minutes before a worker enters the space. The results must be recorded and posted at all points of entry to the confined space.

At least one worker in the confined space must wear a gas monitor, whenever practicable. The monitor provides continuous readings of the oxygen level and any harmful gases that may be present. If the concentration of any of these gases exceeds the alarm limits, an alarm will warn workers to leave the confined space.

Gas monitors must be properly configured, calibrated, and maintained. An inaccurate monitor could lead to a serious incident. Workers must also be equipped with the right kind of monitor for the situation – for example, monitors with sensors for ammonia and hydrogen sulfide will be useless in a confined space containing carbon monoxide and nitrogen dioxide.

Ventilation

All confined spaces must be ventilated before and during work in the space. Air blowing into a confined space will create air currents that mix outside air with stagnant air. The faster the air moves, the more air mixing will occur. As the mixed air exits the space, it carries out contaminants.

Ventilation commonly consists of electric fans attached to ducting. A qualified person must provide written work procedures that describe the following:

- Types of fans and ducting used
- Number of fans required
- Length and number of allowable bends in the ducting
- Appropriate placement of the equipment (e.g., upwind or downwind of the entrance to the space)

Fans and ducting must be properly positioned to adequately ventilate every occupied area inside the confined space and to leave no pockets of contaminated air. It's good practice to strive for maximum ventilation for the space while maintaining worker comfort.

WorkSafeBC offices

Visit our website at worksafebc.com.

Abbotsford
2774 Trethewey Street V2T 3R1
Phone 604.276.3100
1.800.292.2219
Fax 604.556.2077

Burnaby
450 – 6450 Roberts Street V5G 4E1
Phone 604.276.3100
1.888.621.7233
Fax 604.232.5950

Coquitlam
104 – 3020 Lincoln Avenue V3B 6B4
Phone 604.276.3100
1.888.967.5377
Fax 604.232.1946

Courtenay
801 30th Street V9N 8G6
Phone 250.334.8765
1.800.663.7921
Fax 250.334.8757

Kamloops
321 Battle Street V2C 6P1
Phone 250.371.6003
1.800.663.3935
Fax 250.371.6031

Kelowna
110 – 2045 Enterprise Way V1Y 9T5
Phone 250.717.4313
1.888.922.4466
Fax 250.717.4380

Nanaimo
4980 Wills Road V9T 6C6
Phone 250.751.8040
1.800.663.7382
Fax 250.751.8046

Nelson
524 Kootenay Street V1L 6B4
Phone 250.352.2824
1.800.663.4962
Fax 250.352.1816

North Vancouver
400 – 224 Esplanade Ave. W. V7M 1A4
Phone 604.276.3100
1.888.875.6999
Fax 604.232.1558

Prince George
1066 Vancouver Street V2L 5M4
Phone 250.561.3700
1.800.663.6623
Fax 250.561.3710

Surrey
100 – 5500 152 Street V3S 5J9
Phone 604.276.3100
1.888.621.7233
Fax 604.232.7077

Terrace
4450 Lakelse Avenue V8G 1P2
Phone 250.615.6605
1.800.663.3871
Fax 250.615.6633

Victoria
4514 Chatterton Way V8X 5H2
Phone 250.881.3418
1.800.663.7593
Fax 250.881.3482

Head Office / Richmond
Prevention Information Line:
Phone 604.276.3100
1.888.621.7233 (621.SAFE)

Administration:
6951 Westminster Highway
Phone 604.273.2266

Mailing Address:
PO Box 5350 Stn Terminal
Vancouver BC V6B 5L5

After hours
health & safety emergency
604.273.7711
1.866.922.4357 (WCB.HELP)

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