

The 5 fatal mistakes of confined space entries

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The 5 fatal mistakes of confined space entries

1. **The prime causal factor for 92% of confined space fatalities in the last 15 years in Western Australia was 'inadequate confined space entry training'**
2. **Over 90% of confined space fatalities had 'inadequate supervisor knowledge and supervision' as the secondary cause of the fatality.**
3. **Contractors who work within confined spaces make up 60% of fatalities within confined space statistics**
4. **Only 15% of organisations that suffered a confined space fatality had 'appropriate confined space procedures in place'**
5. **Internationally, 60% of confined space fatalities have occurred when personnel have tried to rescue injured personnel from within confined spaces**

After reviewing various Australian and international confined space safety research papers and conducting some of our own research by reviewing the last 15 years of recorded confined space fatalities within Australia, the statistics above paint an alarming picture of the causes of confined space fatalities within Australian workplaces.

After examining these fatalities (as recent as 2011), it is staggering to note that the prime causal factor for 92% of confined space fatalities in the last 15 years in Western Australia was 'inadequate confined space entry training'.

Our research found that:

- Confined space training reduces the risk of a confined space fatalities as employees learn the identification, hazards, risks and safety control measures applicable to confined spaces
- By ensuring that your organisation has confined space procedures in place that suit your work environment you will reduce the risk of a confined space incident
- By providing regular confined space supervisory training for supervisors of confined space entries, the likelihood of an accident reduces
- Contractors are at a far higher risk of incident than employees with a regular workplace. We assume this is because they are less familiar with the site specific confined space hazards present
- There is a substantial risk of rescuer fatalities if confined space workers are not adequately trained in the potential hazards that could be present during an incident and the safe rescue procedures to follow to rescue injured personnel.

This quotation was taken from an American safety journal article and best sums up the risks of un-trained personnel attempting a rescue of an injured person within a confined space - "Other than vehicular accidents, more multiple fatalities occur during confined space entry work than any other type of work performed in the United States today" (De Vaney, 1997, p22).

If you want to substantially reduce the risk of a confined space incident at your workplace, invest in relevant confined space training for your confined space workers and supervisors and ensure that they have adequate confined space safety procedures in place. By providing your staff with confined space entry training, trained confined space supervisors and confined space safety procedures you will increase the knowledge of confined space safety within your organisation and you will improve the confidence and competence of your staff in conducting confined space work safely.

Summary:

This paper is an educational tool to give you the knowledge and skills to decide on the most appropriate confined space safety control measures for your workplace. I hope you read this document and this helps you in making an informed decision for the betterment of confined space safety in your workplace. We wish you the very best with your workplace safety and we hope that this tool helps you to understand some of the research from within this field.

Steve McLeod

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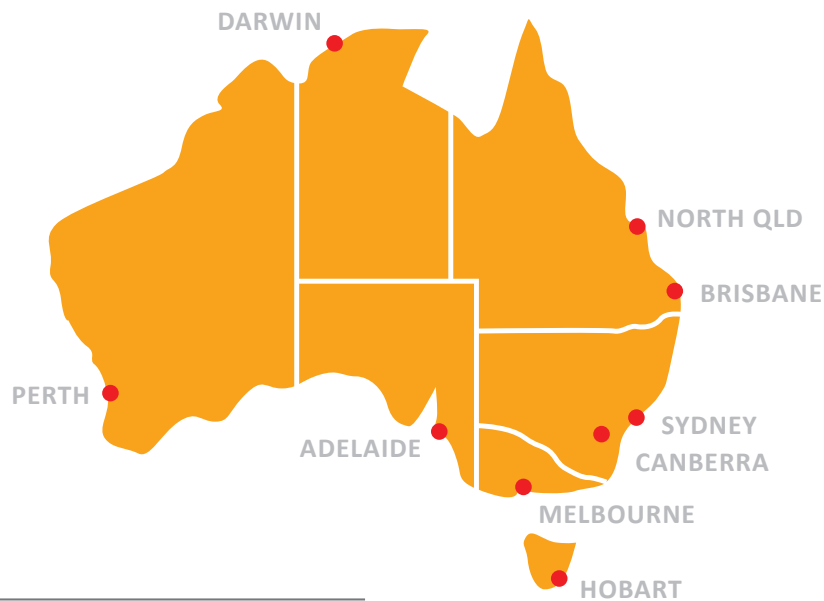
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Research Sources:

WA University Study/ Workcover VIC/ Workcover QLD/ Workcover NSW/ Workcover WA/ Workcover SA/ Workcover NT

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