

Workplace Health & Safety Update



Addressing WH&SQ concerns - Part 1

WH&S Update 14/10

WH&SQ Issue One - Confined Space

What is a confined space?

A confined space is determined by the hazards associated with a set of specific circumstances and not just because work is performed in a small space.

A confined space as defined in the Confined Spaces Code of Practice 2011 (WH&SQ) authority means an enclosed or partially enclosed space that:

- a) is not designed or intended primarily to be occupied by a person; and
- b) is, or is designed to or intended to , maintain a normal atmospheric pressure while any person is in the space; and
- c) is or is likely to be a risk to health and safety from:
 - an atmosphere that does not have a safe oxygen level, or
 - contaminants, including airborne gases, vapours and dusts, that may cause injury from fire or explosion, or
 - harmful concentrations of any airborne contaminants, or
 - Engulfment

Confined spaces often have poor ventilation which allows hazardous atmospheres to quickly develop, especially if the space is small. The hazards are not always obvious and may change from one entry into the confined space to the next.


What is the risk?

The main risk identified within the Brisbane Markets is businesses using forklifts in poorly ventilated areas i.e. cool rooms or enclosed warehouses.

It is important to select the correct type of forklift for the task. Some things to consider include:

1. possible exhaust emissions
2. potential operating time of the forklift within the confined space
3. whether people are working in the area.

What should I do as an employer?

 It is recommended that battery powered forklifts should be used wherever possible in these situations and in cases where they are not used, appropriate controls put in place to prevent any risk to operators or other people.

Forklifts need to be operated within the manufacturer's parameters and only in areas for which they have been designed. For example, it is not safe to use a forklift in an area with a potentially explosive atmosphere unless it has been specifically designed or modified for such use.

It is important for all employers and employees to ensure they perform their tasks in a safe manner, otherwise the consequences could be catastrophic. Some of the risks are listed below:

- a) loss of consciousness, impairment, injury or death due to the immediate effects of airborne contaminants
- b) fire or explosion from the ignition of flammable contaminants
- c) difficulty rescuing and treating an injured or unconscious person
- d) asphyxiation resulting from oxygen deficiency.