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Confined Space Rescue—not A "do It Yourself" Job

By Rick Pedley

When a worker in confined spaces is injured or trapped on the job, the last thing anyone would want is for the rescuers to be hurt as well. Yet, without the right training or specialized confined space equipment, the most well-intentioned hero could unfortunately make matters worse.

What is a confined space?

Confined spaces are not necessarily small, or even closed. They are characterized by having a limited means of entry or exit. They could possibly only be accessed with a ladder, or they may have only one entry point.

Just to give you an idea of the range, some examples of confined spaces are: maintenance holes (manholes), sewers, boilers, tunnels, pipelines, wells, fuel tanks, storage tanks, tank cars and tank trucks, vats, process vessels, septic tanks, sewage lift stations, vaults, silos, bins, and ventilation and exhaust ducts. Confined spaces can even include deep empty swimming pools, deep trenches, deep open top tanks, pits and roof spaces.

Each of these spaces is not necessarily hazardous in and of themselves. However, the size, shape and location of the exit can increase the risk associated with occupying the space in the event of an emergency. For example, a storage tank may for some reason rapidly take on water. It may be unexpectedly difficult to exit due to the nature of the construction of the tank, thus increasing the risk of harm.

These spaces are not regulated by general building codes for habitable structures, since there is no expectation that people will spend a lot of time there. And, since most of us are accustomed to living and working in environments where exits are strictly regulated and hazards carefully foreseen and prevented, we may make the mistake of thinking all spaces are safe. But they're not.

Possible hazards

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Many of the hazards of confined spaces can't be seen or smelt, so are especially dangerous. There may be an oxygen deficiency that is undetectable at first, but becomes progressively worse the further you get into the structure. Some atmospheres are highly flammable through a mixture of dusts, gases or vapors that can explode or catch fire. Toxic gases may be unnoticeable at first as well.

Other hazards include the presence of toxic chemicals, slippery surfaces, becoming stuck in a tight spot, falling, or being buried by material stored in the space. Biological hazards include diseases that can reside in water that stagnates in a confined space.

It's important to be on the lookout for all these possibilities, since they do not occur in normally occupied spaces so they are especially unexpected.

Safety Tips Everyone should be aware of the precautions to take before entering any structure that is not generally intended for human occupation.

--Be aware of the confined spaces around you, and ask for specific training on the space before entering.

--Obtain the correct permits before entering. This is an instance where the laws are not devised to keep anyone from what they need to do, but rather to ensure that everyone using a potentially hazardous space is fully informed of the hazards.

--Monitor the air in the confined space before entry. Poisonous gases may be undetectable to the human senses. Use special confined space equipment such as a gas monitor to determine the safety of the space, both at the top, the middle and the bottom (since different gases have different weights).

--Be sure there is adequate ventilation, or use confined space equipment such as blowers to provide oxygen or get rid of harmful gases. Ventilation should be continuous where possible, because in many confined spaces the hazardous atmosphere will form again when the flow of air is stopped.

--Only enter the space if you are thoroughly trained about potential hazards and have the proper confined space equipment to work safely.

--Assign someone else to be an attendant, and post that person outside the confined space to keep an eye on your status. Attendant should be in constant communication with the person in the confined space to make sure ventilation is working, monitor the air, and call for help.

--Attendants should not, however, attempt to perform a rescue, unless they are fully trained on confined space rescue procedures and there is yet another attendant present.

Confined space equipment It's a good idea to have the proper training and rescue equipment nearby in the event of an emergency, just in case.

Retrieval systems such as tripods and winches can be used to rescue workers without having to enter the space. Rescues that require entry should only be done by specially trained rescue workers.

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In addition to using ventilation and other measures, workers need protective gear. This includes a full body or chest harness and may also require respirators, hard hats, goggles, earplugs or muffs, gloves, boots, or other protective clothing.

In short, while it is a good instinct to want to be helpful when you can see someone else is in danger, you don't want to compound the problem by putting yourself in danger, too. Contact a qualified professional as quickly as possible, and use proper confined space equipment for rescue. You may be saving more than one life by doing so.

Rick Pedley owns and operates PK Safety Supply, a distributor of safety and

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Hijacked!

By Laura Quarantiello

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The four airplane hijackings, which were part of the tragic events of September 11, 2001 were not typical. These sickos were not seeking escape from political persecution, nor were they interested in money. They intended to die and to take everyone else with them. Based on available information we have to conclude that there was nothing those poor passengers could have done to save themselves. They were doomed from the beginning.

In a "normal" hijacking, however, passengers at least have some chance of survival. And following can increase that a few guidelines:

First, do your best to remain calm, and encourage those around you to do the same. The hijackers are probably extremely nervous and scared, so comply with whatever they tell you to do. Do nothing to draw attention to yourself. You want to be just another face in the crowd. Do not attempt to hide your passport or your valuables.

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If one of the hijackers speaks to you, reply in a calm, normal Voice. Pass the time by unobtrusively taking mental notes on the characteristics and behavior of the hijackers. Give each one a nickname. Notice their manner of dress, facial features, mannerisms and temperament (but don't be obvious about the interest you are taking in them.) If you or a nearby passenger is in need of assistance due to illness or other discomfort, ask a member of the crew for assistance first. Do not attempt to approach the hijackers unless they have already rendered assistance to another passenger. If you are singled out be responsive but do not volunteer information.

Resolution of a hijacking incident may come in the form of negotiation or by a rescue team. In the case of a rescue operation you need to realize that a controlled assault on the plane may come from police or military. If you hear shots fired, drop to the floor. Rescue team members may instruct you to vacate the aircraft or put your hands up. Do what you are told immediately, and don't make any sudden movements. Remember, at this point the rescue team may not know if you are friend or foe. Once outside the aircraft, follow orders

From military or other officials without any hesitation or Argument.

Laura Quarantiello is the author of "Air-Ways: The Insider's Guide to Air Travel" – a handbook for air travelers. To order or for more info visit: <http://www.tiare.com/airways.htm>



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