

**England, Wales and  
Scotland**

**Confined Spaces Regulations  
1997**

**Northern Ireland**

**Confined Spaces Regulations  
(Northern Ireland) 1999**

**Other legislation may also  
apply, depending on where  
the confined space is  
situated or on the task being  
carried out.**

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# Confined Spaces

A confined space is a space that is enclosed and has a reasonably foreseeable risk of fire, explosion, asphyxiation or drowning.

The space may be small and restrictive for the worker, or it could be far larger—for example, a grain storage silo with a capacity of hundreds of cubic metres.

## What are the hazards?

Many people are killed or seriously injured in confined spaces every year in the UK. This happens in a wide range of industries, from those involving complex plant to simple storage vessels. People killed and injured include those working in the confined space and those attempt rescues without proper training and equipment.

Working in a confined space is dangerous because of the risks from noxious fumes, reduced oxygen levels or fire. Other dangers include flooding, drowning and asphyxiation from a source such as dust, grain or another contaminant.

## What do I have to do?

Wherever possible, avoid carrying out tasks in confined spaces. Where this is not possible, assess the risks of the particular confined space and plan how you will control those risks. For example:

- If a confined space has noxious fumes, consider how they can be ventilated or removed.
- If there is a risk of liquids or gases flooding in, establish whether the valves can be locked shut.
- If someone is going into a confined space and there is not enough oxygen to breathe properly, provide a breathing apparatus or ventilate the space to increase oxygen levels before entering.

You should also have emergency arrangements where necessary. Consider the following if your employees are working in a confined space:

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- How will you know they are okay and haven't been trapped or overcome by fumes or contaminants?
  - How will you get them out if they are trapped or overcome by fumes or contaminants? (It is not enough to rely on emergency services.)

**Do:**

- Be aware of the risks that may occur within a confined space.
- Make sure your employees are capable of doing the work and trained in both the work and the use of emergency equipment

**Don't:**

- Work in confined spaces unless it's essential to do so.
- Ignore the risks. Just because a confined space is safe one day doesn't mean it will always be safe.
- Let others enter a confined space until you are sure it's safe to do so.

### Case Study:

Scenario	How to Avoid the Fumes
<p>Having identified a fault in a crane's hydraulics, two men accessed a closed compartment. Within a minute of entering the compartment, one had passed out and the other was feeling lightheaded but managed to escape. Two others entered and tried to save the first man but were both overcome.</p> <p>The three men were extracted by emergency services, but two of them died.</p>	<p>Water had entered the compartment and caused rusting, which depleted the oxygen levels. Had the oxygen levels been checked before the workers entered the space, it could have been ventilated and the deaths could have been avoided.</p>