

Marine Information Bulletin

Confined spaces can kill

Issued November 2004; last reviewed 1 September 2016

Purpose

The purpose of this Marine Information Bulletin is to remind shipowners, masters, crews, accredited persons and marine officers of the hazards found on board ships, in particular the high risk associated with confined spaces and the importance of using appropriate procedures to provide for safe entry.

Background

Failure to adopt a systematic and careful approach to confined space entry can result in injury and death. Multiple fatalities have occurred in confined spaces especially when rescuers fail to assess the risk and take appropriate steps.

Confined space hazards are not confined to toxic or oxygen depleted atmospheres. There are many different kinds of confined spaces on board ships such as sealed void spaces, fuel tanks, sullage tanks, battery storage compartments, and compartments where explosive gases may accumulate due to construction work. There have been circumstances where workers or contractors have risked serious injury as a result of not having equipment isolated when working in a confined space.

The level of risk will vary considerably depending on the nature of the space, the material contained within the space and the hazard control arrangements. As a consequence the procedures and precautions required will depend on the nature of the space and the level of the hazard present.

Requirements

Ship operators have a general safety obligation/duty under part 4 of the *Transport Operations (Marine Safety) Act 1994*, part 3 of the *Queensland Workplace Health and Safety Act 2011* and part 3 of the *Marine Safety (Domestic Commercial Vessel) National Law Act 2012*, which imposes a duty to ensure safety of vessel equipment and operations by owners, masters,

designers, builders and suppliers and to ensure that procedures for confined space entry are implemented and adherence to the procedures is monitored.

Appropriate training is required to ensure that all ship's staff involved in confined space entry are aware of the procedures and have sufficient knowledge to assess the risks and apply measures to minimise risks associated with confined space entry.

Confined space entry procedures should be part of a ship's Safety Management System (SMS). *Australian/New Zealand Standard AS/NZS 2865 – 2009 'Confined Spaces'* defines confined spaces and outlines risk assessment and entry permit requirements.

Guidance on developing safe procedures for confined space entry can be obtained from this standard.

Identification, assessment and controlling the risks associated with confined spaces are important steps in minimising risks that can occur during confined space entry.

Procedures for confined space entry should be reviewed periodically and crew members should be appropriately trained.

All void spaces must be identified by internationally recognised signage such as the *Australian Standard AS 1319 Safety Signs for the Occupational Environment* or other recognised national or international standard.

Persons with a safety obligation on board ships should also consider other risks associated with the operation of the ship and take appropriate action. *Australian/New Zealand Standard AS/NZS ISO 31000:2009 'Risk Management'* describes a formal process for establishing a systematic risk management program.

Ship owners, masters, crews and accredited persons should recognise risk management as an integral part of good ship management practice. Risk management is the term applied to a logical and systematic method of establishing the context, identifying, analysing, evaluating, treating, monitoring and communicating risks associated with an activity.

Risk management is as much about identifying opportunities as avoiding or mitigating losses. To manage risk properly, appropriate documentation is required.

Queensland Workplace Health and Safety provide detailed brochures relating to the dangers of confined spaces such as, *Working in Confined Spaces and A Quick Guide to Working Safely in Confined Spaces*.

These brochures are available on the internet at www.deir.qld.gov.au/workplace/businesses

Brochures are also available relating to the reduction of risk in the workplace. These may be obtained by visiting Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, by telephoning 1300 369 915 or by visiting the website above.

Further information

For further information contact your local Maritime Safety Queensland office:

Airlie Beach	4841 4500
Bundaberg	4132 6600
Cairns	4052 7400
Gladstone	4971 5200
Hervey Bay	4194 9600
Mackay	4944 3700
Mooloolaba	5452 1825
Brisbane	3632 7500
Gold Coast	5585 1810
Townsville	4421 8100

Other Marine Information Bulletins about the safe operation of ships are on Maritime Safety Queensland's website at www.msq.qld.gov.au