



# Toolbox Talk

## Confined Space Monitor: Don't Be a Dead Hero

You are standing at the top of an open manhole, acting as attendant for a team of maintenance personnel who have entered a permit-required confined space. It has been several minutes since you talked to the crew, but you can peer down into the space and see them. During your last few checks with them, everything was fine.

This time, however, when you call down to check on them, you get no response. You look inside the hole and notice they are slumped over or leaning against the wall. You call again, but they don't move or react.

Alarmed, you yell loudly for help, knowing it will be many minutes before a rescue team arrives. Those are your friends down there and they need to get out of the hole! They are so close to the top, you could almost reach down and pull them up. Your pulse is beating and you breathe hard from excitement. You try again to arouse them. Something has to be done — so you jump down into the hole to get them out.

The rescue team arrives in time to pull your lifeless body out with the rest. The record will show that you attempted to rescue your friends and gave your life in doing so. Some would say you were a hero. Maybe so, but you are a dead hero!

The lesson of this scenario is that when you are an attendant watching over a confined space, **your duty is to observe and assist from outside**. If you have a tag line on the person inside and can pull them out without entry, go ahead (but consider: how much dead weight can you lift from below your feet?). If you have the proper rescue tripod, you can winch the victim to the surface. **But at no time should you enter the space to attempt a rescue**. You *can* wait until a new attendant arrives, put on the proper rescue equipment and then enter (provided that you have been trained in rescue procedures). **But you must NEVER abandon your duties as the attendant and attempt rescue on your own**. You don't know what the hazards are that overcame your coworkers.

More than half the workers who die in confined spaces are attempting to rescue other workers. Attendants should not enter a confined space until help arrives, and then only if trained and with proper protective equipment, lifelines and respirators.

Confined spaces can be killers. Know the risks and take appropriate measures to control them:

- Be sure that air samples are taken before entry, and as frequently as the activities being conducted require
- Provide ventilation into the space if required
- Use all personal protective equipment in accordance with the manufacturer's directions
- Use your entry permit to log the sample results and the time of each test
- Have a rescue plan established before it is needed with communications in place for emergency assistance

**Think SAFETY and stay ALIVE.**

