

Confined Spaces in Construction: Attendants

Scenario

OSHA regulation focuses on those spaces with immediate risk to health or safety, called “permit-required” confined spaces (permit spaces).

It happened like this

The vat in the production area had to be entered in order to perform an inspection and to get some new equipment installed.

Tony was assigned to be the entry supervisor (and the entry attendant), while Vern and Justin were to enter the permit-required confined space. Tony was also a member of the confined space rescue team.

The vat was large and had internal baffles, which meant that Tony would not be able stay in visual contact with the two men. In addition, there was the potential for a small amount of cleaning agent vapors to be present in the space. However, the oxygen content should have been fine since the vat was just ventilated to rid it of the cleaning agent vapors.

Vern entered the space first, wearing a respirator designed to filter the cleaning agent vapor. His duty was to test the atmosphere for oxygen content and vapor. After five minutes he still hadn't returned. Tony and Justin were both concerned. Justin donned his self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA) — and also a harness and rope to assist in rescue, if necessary — and went in to find Vern. They both had the radios, but Tony insisted that they agree on another non-verbal signal to indicate trouble. They decided that if there was a problem, Justin would call on the radio first and tug on the rope if, for some reason, the radio wasn't an option.

Five minutes passed without either man returning. Tony decided to tug on the rope. There's no reply, so he tugged harder. There was a feeble tug back and then nothing — just dead weight on the other end of the rope.

Tony knew something was terribly wrong and used his radio to call for help. The emergency rescue team would arrive in about ten minutes, much too long for Tony's liking. After all, he had a SCBA and was a trained member of the rescue team. However, OSHA regulations require that he remain outside the permit-required confined space.

Tony decided to go in, anyway. He got back on the radio and told the rescue team he was going in to find Vern and Justin. As Tony entered the vat, his thought was to follow the rope tied to Justin's rescue harness.



What are the issues?

What did Tony do right?

What did Tony do wrong?

What do you think should happen next?

