Guide To Atmospheric Testing In Confined Spaces

This application note is intended to provide general information and to act as a reminder of the dangers

associated with atmospheric hazards in a confined space. It outlines the following:

- What is a confined space?
- Atmospheric hazards found in a confined space.
- RAE Systems products for confined space entry.

What Is a Confined Space?

The confined space entry standard was established by *OSHA 29CFR 1910.146* in April of 1993. The standard was developed to provide a defined work plan for confined space entry. Confined space entries are part of a daily routine throughout the industrial workplace.

A Confined Space Is Defined As a Space That:

- Is large enough for an employee to enter and perform work.
- Has limited or restricted means for entry or exit.
- Is not designed for continuous human occupancy.

A Permit-Required Confined Space Is Defined As:

A confined space, plus one of the following:

- Contains, or has a known potential to contain, a hazardous atmosphere.
- Contains material with the potential for engulfment.
- Has an internal design that could entrap or asphyxiate the entrant.
- Contains any recognized safety or health hazard.

Examples of confined spaces:

- Storage tanks and vessels
- Sewers and manholes
- Underground utility vaults
- Agriculture silos
- Railcar tanks
- Marine vessel tanks
- Tunnels
- Grain elevators

Atmospheric Hazards in Confined Spaces

Atmospheric hazards in a confined space are those that expose entrants to a risk such as death, entrapment, injury, or acute illness from one or more of the following causes:

Oxygen

An atmospheric oxygen concentration below 19.5% (oxygen deficiency), or above 23.5% (oxygen enrichment).

Potential Effects of Oxygen Sufficient and Deficient Atmospheres

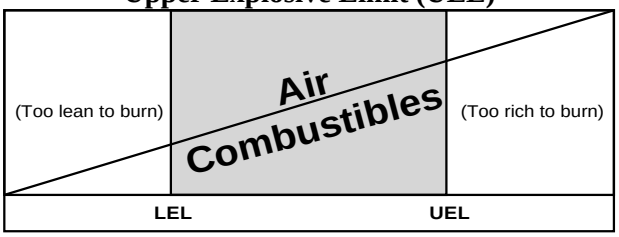
Oxygen Content (% by Vol.)	Effects and Symptoms (At Atmospheric Pressure)
> 23.5%	Oxygen enriched, extreme fire hazard
20.9%	Oxygen concentration in normal air
19.5%	Minimum permissible oxygen level
15-19%	Decreased ability to work strenuously; may impair coordination and may cause early symptoms for persons of coronary, pulmonary or circulatory problems
10-12%	Respiration further increases in rate and depth; poor judgement, blue lips
8-10%	Mental failure, fainting, unconsciouness, ashen face, nausea, and vomiting
6-8%	Recovery still possible after four to five minutes. 50% fatal after six minutes. Fatal after eight minutes.
4-6%	Coma in 40 seconds, convulsions, respiration ceases, death

These values are approximate and vary, due to an individual's state of health and physical activity.

RAE Systems Inc.
3775 N. First St., San Jose, CA 95134-1708 USA
Phone: +1.888.723.8823
Email: raesales@raesystems.com
Web Site: www.raesystems.com

Combustible Gases
A flammable gas or vapor in excess of 10% of its lower explosive limit (LEL) yet still remaining below the upper explosive limit UEL).

Lower Explosive Limit (LEL) Vs. Upper Explosive Limit (UEL)

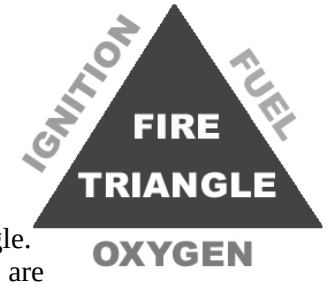


- The lowest concentration (air-fuel mixture) at which a gas can ignite is called lower explosive limit (LEL). Concentrations below this limit are too lean to burn.
- The highest concentration that can be ignited is its upper explosive limit (UEL). Above that concentration, the mixture is too rich to burn.

The Fire Triangle

For combustion to occur, there must be three elements:

1. Fuel
2. Oxygen to support combustion
3. Heat or a source of ignition



This is called the fire triangle. If any of the three elements are missing, combustion cannot occur.

Combustible Gas - Percent By Volume

RAE Systems' one- to five-gas VRAE surveying monitors read out in both % LEL and % by volume.

For example the LEL of methane is 5% by volume, and the UEL is 15% by volume. When a confined space reaches 2.5% methane by volume this would be equal to 50% LEL. (5% methane by volume would be 100% LEL.) Between 5 to 15% by volume, a spark could cause an explosion.

Different gases have different % by volume concentrations to reach 100% LEL. Some examples are:

Pentane's LEL is 1.5% by volume; Hexane's LEL is 1.1% by volume; Propane's LEL is 2.1% by volume and gasoline's LEL is 1.4% by volume.

Toxic Gases

An atmospheric concentration of any toxic containment above the OSHA permissible exposure limit (PEL).
Here are examples of common toxic gases found in a confined space.

Toxic Gas	TWA	STEL	Ceiling	IDLH
Ammonia	25 ppm	35 ppm	--	500 ppm
Carbon monoxide	25 ppm	--	200 ppm	1,500 ppm
Chlorine	0.5 ppm	1 ppm	--	30 ppm
Hydrogen cyanide	--	4.7 ppm	--	50 ppm
Hydrogen sulfide	10 ppm	15 ppm	--	300 ppm
Nitric oxide	25 ppm	--	--	100 ppm
Sulphur dioxide	2 ppm	5 ppm	--	100 ppm

Life-Threatening Effects: CO & H_2S

Effects Of Carbon Monoxide Exposure		
PPM	**Time**	**Effects & Symptoms**
35	8 hours	Permissible Exposure Level
200	3 hours	Slight headache, discomfort
400	2 hours	Headache, discomfort
600	1 hours	Headache, discomfort
1000-2000	2 hours	Confusion, discomfort
1000-2000	½ - 1 hour	Tendency to stagger
1000-2000	30	Slight heart palpitations
2000-2500	30	Unconsciousness
4000	> 1 hour	Fatal

Effects Of Hydrogen Sulfide Exposure		
PPM	**Time**	**Effects & Symptoms**
10	8 hour	Permissible exposure level
50-100	1 hour	Mild eye and respiratory irritition
200-300	1 hour	Marked eye and respiratory irritation
500-700	½-1 hour	Unconsciousness, death
>1000	Minutes	Unconsciousness, death

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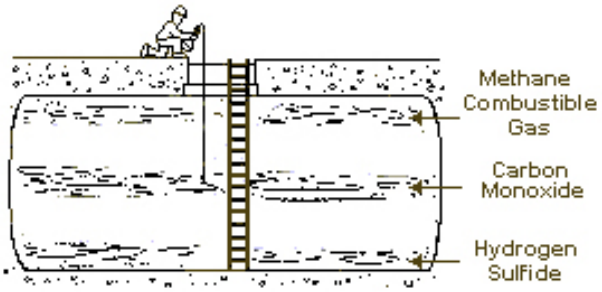
Monitoring Confined Spaces for Atmospheric Hazards

Monitoring the air inside a confined space is required prior to entering. Testing a confined space for atmospheric hazards should be done remotely before entering, and should be done in this order:

- **Oxygen.** Ensure that proper oxygen levels are present.
- **Combustible gases.** Ensure that combustible gases are not present
- **Toxic Gases.** Ensure that toxic gases are below the OSHA permissible exposure limit. Common toxic gases in a confined space could be hydrogen sulfide (H2S) and carbon monoxide (CO), but other toxic compounds could be present. RAE Systems offers monitors to evaluate all these gases either individually or simultaneously.

In a confined space, it is important to take samples at the top, middle, and bottom to locate varying concentrations of gases and vapors. There are some gases lighter than air (for example, methane and other combustible gases) that can be found at the top of a confined space. There are other gases that are heavier than air (for example, hydrogen sulfide) that can settle near the bottom of a confined space. Still other gases are the same weight as air (for example, carbon monoxide) that can be found throughout a confined space.



Take air samples at several levels within the confined space and continuously monitor the space, because conditions can change.

As the remote air monitoring is completed and the area is safe for entry, confined space entry permits should be completed and followed. After the initial entry, monitoring the air in the confined space should be continuous. A confined space entry attendant or hole watch should carry out the continuous monitoring. Conditions in a confined space can change without warning, due to leakage, toxic vapor release, or disturbing the contents of the space.

Monitors for Confined Space Entry

RAE Systems offers the latest and most innovative monitors available for Confined Space Entry (CSE). Datalogging is an option on all our multi-gas monitors.

QRAE, Confined Space Entry Monitor

The Q-RAE CSE Monitor is pre-set as an easy to use tool to comply with the atmospheric testing required by *OSHA 29CFR 1910.146*. The Q-RAE offers the flexibility to work effectively in a confined space while remaining protected from combustibles, hydrogen sulfide, carbon monoxide, and high or low oxygen levels.

Oxygen Concentration

OSHA levels between 19.5% and 23.5%. The MultiRAE has preset alarms (low 19.5% and high 23.5%) which are user selectable, to warn of a hazardous condition.

Combustible Gases

Concentrations below 100% of the LEL. The MultiRAE has a pre-set alarm at 10% LEL of combustible gases, and a high alarm set at 20% LEL. These alarm set points are user selectable.

Toxic Gases:

Alarms pre-set at the OSHA permissible exposure limit. The MultiRAE has pre-set alarms for H_2S at 10 ppm low alarm, and 20 ppm high alarm. CO alarms are at 35 ppm low alarm and 200 ppm high alarm. These alarm set points are user selectable. The MultiRAE also offers several other toxic gas sensors.

MultiRAE Toxic Gas Monitor With PID

The MultiRAE is an excellent personal protection monitor. It combines the traditional security of standard electrochemical and catalytic sensors with the next generation, broad-band protection of a photo-ionization detector (PID). Unlike the Q-RAE, this monitor offers a wide variety of interchangeable toxic sensors supplementable with a PID for applications such as confined space entry.

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VRAE One to Five, Toxic Gas Surveyer
The VRAE's powerful internal pump, combined with RAE Systems' wide selection of toxic sensors, presents a highly effective, continuous surveying monitor. The VRAE can monitor combustibles in percent of LEL or in percent by volume.

ToxiRAE Single-Gas Monitors
RAE Systems also offers a complete line of single gas monitors for confined space entry applications.

Additional information:

Federal Register
29 CFR 1910.146
Permit Required Confined Spaces for General Industry
http://cos.gdb.org

OSHA
U.S. Department of Labor
http://www.osha-slc.gov

OSHA Regulations (Standards - 29 CFR) - 1910.146 - Permit-required confined spaces OSHA Regulations (Standards - 29 CFR) - 1910.146 - Permit-required confined spaces . 1910.146 - Permit-required confined spaces. Standard Number: 1910.146 .Standard Title: Permit-required confined spaces.
www.osha-slc.gov/OshStd_data/1910_0146.html

OSHA Regulations (Standards - 29 CFR) - 1910.146 App C - Examples of Permit-required Confined Space Programs OSHA Regulations (Standards - 29 CFR) - 1910.146 App C - Examples of Permit-required Confined Space Programs . 1910.146 App C - Examples of Permit-required Confined Space Programs. Standard Number: 1910.146 App C .Standard Title: Examples.
www.osha-slc.gov/OshStd_data/1910_0146_APP_C.html

OSHA Regulations (Standards - 29 CFR) - 1910.146 App A - Permit-required Confined Space Decision Flow Chart OSHA Regulations (Standards - 29 CFR) - 1910.146 App A - Permit-required Confined Space Decision Flow Chart . 1910.146 App A - Permit-required Confined Space Decision Flow Chart. Standard Number: 1910.146 App A .Standard Title:
www.osha-slc.gov/OshStd_data/1910_0146_APP_A.html

Disclaimer:

This application note contains only a general description of atmospheric testing in a confined space and equipment used to monitor a confined space. Under no circumstances should a confined space be entered or monitoring equipment used except by qualified and trained personnel, and after all instructions have been carfully read and understood and all precautions followed.

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