



OREGON PACIFIC-CASCADE CHAPTER

Safety Training Topics

October 2024

Wildfire Smoke

Mental Health Awareness

Focus on the Fundamentals

Confined Space Basics

Confined Space - Attendant Duties

SAFETY TRAINING TOPIC

Wildfire Smoke

What is Wildfire Smoke?

Wildfire smoke is a mix of particles and gases containing many different kinds of chemicals. Gases include carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, and nitrogen oxides. Depending on the material that is burning, the gases could also include other compounds that are carcinogenic.

What are the health effects?

1. **If you have any existing lung or heart conditions, exposure to the smoke may aggravate those symptoms even more. The long term and short-term effects of the smoke depends on:**
 - a. Level of smoke
 - b. Duration of exposure
 - c. Age
 - d. Current medical conditions

2. **In general, long term health risks (cancer or other chronic health problems) from short term exposure at low or moderate levels, are quite low. So, we don't need to freak out.**

Some symptoms include:

- a. Irritation of the eyes, nose, and throat
- b. Headaches
- c. Worsening of allergies

What can I do to limit my smoke exposure at work?

3. **Most of us work outside, exerting large amounts of physical activity, which is not the best scenario for heavy, smoky days. Here are some ways you can protect yourself:**
 - a. Reschedule outside work if possible
 - b. Relocate work to a less smoky area if possible
 - c. Take breaks indoors
 - d. Stay hydrated (to avoid heat stress)
 - e. When driving, keep vents and windows closed, put A/C on re-circulate. Once you get to an area with better air quality, then open the windows to get the CO2 out.
 - f. PPE-If you feel you require more protection, you can wear a respirator. The most common type is the N95 particulate-filtering face piece respirator.
 - g. Keep in mind that respirators are not the same as masks (i.e., surgical masks, face coverings). Masks are loose fitting and don't have a tight seal that is required.
 - h. If you do choose to use a respirator, you must be fit tested to use them and they have to meet the standards (NIOSH-approved).

What should I do if I experience wildfire smoke symptoms?

If you're experiencing symptoms that you think are related to the smoke, treat it like any other first aid incident and report it to your supervisor.

From there, follow your company procedures for handling first aid.

SAFETY TRAINING TOPIC

Mental Health Awareness

Mental health and wellness, though never included in Safety Week before, may be one of the biggest safety issues on our jobsites today. When people who are struggling with substance abuse, depression, anxiety and personality disorders show up to work they are likely to be distracted and fatigued, and may have severely impaired judgment and perception. This could obviously result in incidents or injuries to themselves or someone else, or – at its worst case – self-inflicted injury or even death.

Construction is the second-leading industry at risk for suicide by men. Statistics show that rates of suicide thoughts, plans, and attempts are more than double that of the general population.

Why does it hit us so hard? There are many factors of our jobs that have an impact. First, it is a high-pressure industry. We are driven by schedule, budget and production demands. We are always pushing, and that can take a toll. Many construction workers travel regularly and are away from their families for extended periods of time. We deal with sleep disruption or deprivation due to shift work, and oftentimes manage seasonal or end-of-project layoffs. Many in our industry suffer from chronic pain that is the result of years and years of hard physical labor, and a high number of that population self-medicates with drugs or alcohol.

Last – but maybe most important, we are an “old school” and “tough” industry. This often prevents people from opening up, sharing shortcomings, or asking for help. This is what we need to fix. For many, a coworker could be a last line of defense. We need to educate ourselves and be on the lookout for warning signs, and we need to encourage people to open up and seek help when necessary.

I encourage you to take care of yourselves, take care of each other, and know who to go to for help. We are all in this together, and together we can eliminate the stigma surrounding mental health and asking for help.

Discuss ways your team can prioritize the mental health of all employees and share resources for where help can be found for those who need it.

Discuss these questions with your crew. Possible answers are listed below each question.

1. What are some warning signs?

- a. Increased or excessive use of drugs or alcohol*
- b. Anxiety*
- c. Difficulty sleeping or dramatic increase in sleeping*
- d. Lack of purpose or comments about having no reason to live*
- e. Withdrawal*
- f. Dramatic mood swings or uncharacteristic anger*
- g. Recklessness*

2. How can you be an active listener? (getting people to share their struggles)

- a. *Watch non-verbal signs*
- b. *Ask open-ended questions or prompt with "tell me more"*
- c. *Make sure to remain non-judgmental, and resist offering advice*
- d. *Reflect back key feelings or phrases to assure the person they are being heard*
- e. *You don't have to wait for the perfect time*

3. IF you suspect that someone is considering suicide:

- a. *Ask the direct question*
- b. *Thank them for sharing*
- c. *Provide hope and let them know that "we are a team"*
- d. *Keep them safe until they can get professional help*
- e. *Notify and hand off to the professionals*

4. Encourage sharing and story-telling:

- a. *Have you known someone who has dealt with a substance abuse problem?*
- b. *Do you know a teenager who has dealt with depression?*
- c. *Have you ever had a co-worker dealing with serious marital or financial issues?*
- d. *Have you ever known someone who attempted to commit suicide? (partner up for this question)*

Crew Signatures:

SAFETY TRAINING TOPIC

Focus on the Fundamentals

“The minute you get away from fundamentals – whether its proper technique, work ethic or mental preparation – the bottom can fall out of your game, your schoolwork, your job, whatever you’re doing” (Michael Jordan).

Michael Jordan is right; the bottom can fall out of your game without focusing on the fundamentals. In basketball, losing focus on the fundamentals will cause a player to miss a shot, miss a pass or a rebound. In the construction world, ***in our world***, losing focus on the fundamentals can have much more serious consequences. If we lose focus on the fundamentals, someone gets injured or worse.

We are currently in very challenging and trying times. We are having to approach and build our work differently as we try to protect ourselves, our co-workers and our families from the Coronavirus. These challenges cause distractions, which in turn can cause us to lose focus on the fundamentals.

To build our work safely, our employees need to know what the fundamentals are, and why they are important. It is also critically important that our employees follow the principles of Speak Up – Listen Up; that they are watching out for one another. If we can commit to watching out for one another, speaking up and listening, we can ensure that distractions don’t allow any of us to lose focus.

Crew Discussion:

1. What are the basic safety fundamentals on this job?
2. What are some of the safety fundamentals that are unique to this project or task?
3. What safety fundamentals do we need to consider if there is a change in conditions on this project?
4. Why are safety fundamentals important and what are the possible consequences of losing focus on them?

SAFETY TRAINING TOPIC

Confined Space Basics

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this safety talk, participants will be able to:

- Be familiar with permit and non-permit confined spaces
- Be aware of methods to minimize the hazards of working in a confined space

There are two types of confined spaces and the level of danger or potential harm determines the category. A non-permit space is a confined space that doesn't have the potential to contain a hazard capable of causing death or a serious injury. A permit confined space is one that has the potential to produce conditions that can cause a serious injury or death. Before you enter a confined space, you should assume that it's permit required until it has been confirmed that it isn't. By assuming it requires a permit, you won't accidentally enter a dangerous situation. Some things to remember when you have to work in or around a confined space follow:

- Conditions change. Before you enter a confined space, be sure you've checked the oxygen level which is well within the safety zone. You must be aware that oxygen levels can and DO change. If the permit has time restrictions, be sure to abide by them, they're there for a reason.
- Permission may be limited. A permit may only apply to specific parts of a confined space. You should be aware of what parts of a confined space the permit allows you to work in safely and stay in that area.
- Heed the permit. All the information on a permit is there for a reason, pay close attention to all of the details. Missing even one item may be fatal for you.
- Be aware of safe work procedures of a confined space and review them as you enter and work in the area. One misstep in procedure can result in tragedy.
- Remember that a permit is only good for the date that it's issued on. The conditions in a confined space have the potential to change quickly, so yesterday's permit will not reflect current conditions. Don't enter the space until you've told the entry supervisor about the date issue and you've gotten approval to proceed.
- Never enter a confined space unless all the conditions of the permit are met. Notify the entry supervisor about any issues you may have with the permit or the conditions of the confined space.
- The danger of a confined space is NOT dependent on the amount of time that you spend in the space. If the space has any dangers associated with it, you need a permit, whether you'll be in the space for 8 hours, 8 minutes or 8 seconds.
- Always obey what the entry attendant requires of you. The attendant is there for a reason, to keep you safe and is sometimes your only link to the world outside of the confined space.

- It isn't uncommon for you to suffer from impaired judgment from low oxygen levels or other factors in a confined space. This is why you must pay attention to the entry attendants' warnings. Since they're on the outside, they aren't affected by the conditions inside the space and will be able to determine your level of safety better than you may be able to.

By being aware of the potential hazards associated with confined spaces and what you can do to protect yourself, you have a better chance of staying safe.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is the major difference between permit and non-permit confined spaces?
- When is it possible for a permit required space to become a non-permit space?
- What should you do if you notice that the date on the permit is yesterday's date?
- There are aspects of the confined space that are missing from the permit; what should you do?

SAFETY TRAINING TOPIC

Confined Space - Attendant Duties

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this safety talk, participants will be able to:

- Be familiar with what crew members should expect from the entry attendant
- Be familiar with their responsibilities as an entry attendant

When you're working in or around confined spaces one of your most important pieces of safety equipment is the entry supervisor or attendant. And just like any other piece of your safety equipment that you rely on, you have to trust and listen to the attendant. Having a responsible attendant watching out for you can be what keeps you alive. When you're working in a confined space, some things to remember about the entry attendant:

- They should stay in contact with the crew working inside; although, this doesn't mean a running conversation. The attendant should listen for and to the normal work sounds and periodically check in by asking questions like "How are you doing in there" or "What is your oxygen level now?"
- If the attendant must leave the entry post and there is no replacement, the entire crew must exit the confined space.
- You don't have the authority to dismiss an attendant. If the permit requires an entry attendant, not having one violates the permit and no crew can be in the confined space. Although the crew may feel they are safe in the space without the attendant, the attendant cannot leave until they've been replaced.

If you're charged with being the attendant, some of the duties you'll be responsible for include:

- Although being an attendant may not be the most interesting task on the jobsite, it's important to stay as focused as possible. Becoming involved in a conversation, reading the newspaper or listening to music are distractions that must be avoided.
- Never enter the confined space unless a replacement is in place. When you do enter the space, you must observe all entry cautions in the permit, like PPE for example. Even "poking your head in" is considered entering.
- You must be familiar with the confined entry permit before you allow the crew to enter. Everyone stays out until you understand the permit.
- Be sure communication equipment is in working order at the beginning of your shift and periodically tested. Be sure both the crew and your supervisor or first responder can hear you.
- Stay in contact with the crew.

- You're there to GET help, not necessarily provide it. Your communication system is in place to alert first responders that help is needed. Rushing into an emergency situation in a confined space will probably cause you to be yet another person that needs rescuing.
- You should test any extraction equipment that is available for use at the confined space. Before using the extraction equipment always call for help.

Entry attendants are crucial to the safety of the crew working in a confined space. The responsibilities of the attendant must be clear to everyone involved; the attendant and all crew members.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- The attendant offers to make the lunch run before the crew leaves the space to save time; do you let him go?
- You're feeling light-headed in the confined space. What should you do?
- What are the major responsibilities of the entry attendant?
- The permit requires extraction equipment for each crew member. When the 3-man crew shows up; there are only two sets of extraction equipment; what do you do?