

Confined Spaces: Protect the Attendant's Role

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Why this matters

An attendant cannot protect entrants while a conflicting assignment takes attention elsewhere. Confirm the role, communication and response arrangements before entry and throughout the work.

Objective: Explain the attendant's limits and verify a workable communication and relief arrangement.

Key hazards or failure points

Lost entrant count; missed warnings; outside hazards; failed communication; distracting duties; missing relief; unplanned rescue entry.

Practical controls

- Use the construction permit-space program and trained assigned roles. Keep attendant duties free of competing work that interferes with entrant protection.
- Maintain entrant identification and communication, assess conditions inside and outside, and use the program's evacuation triggers.
- Remain outside until properly relieved. Summon rescue promptly when needed; perform only the rescue actions assigned by the employer's procedure.

Verify It in the Field

The entry supervisor confirms the assigned attendant, actual entrants, permit and uninterrupted coverage, including relief arrangements.

Before entry, safely check the specified communications and signals from the planned locations without exposing anyone or activating an uncoordinated emergency response.

The attendant explains evacuation triggers and the rescue summons method. The supervisor confirms required rescue availability and resolves any gap.

Stop and reassess

Order evacuation for a prohibited condition, dangerous outside situation, apparent exposure effects or inability to perform attendant duties safely. Use the program for lost communication, suspension and authorized reentry.

Ask the crew

1. What would distract our attendant?
2. How will an evacuation message be understood?
3. What happens before the attendant leaves the post?

Use this HOP tool — Three-way communication: Before entry, the attendant sends one routine status instruction using the planned communication method. The receiver repeats its meaning; the sender confirms or corrects it. Then identify the emergency evacuation signal and explain why acting on it must not await a lengthy exchange.

Sources: OSHA 1926.1209; OSHA 1926.1210; OSHA 1926.1211; DOE Vol. 2, pp. 26–27. HOP concepts adapted from DOE-HDBK-1028-2009, Vol. 2 (June 2009). No claim to original U.S. Government work; no government endorsement implied.

Free next step: JHA/JSA planning and field-verification worksheet

Expanded guidance and separate forms: toddjeromejenkins.com/toolbox-talks/confined-space-attendant-duties