Confined spaces

Sewer systems >

This information bulletin has been developed to assist in recognising the hazards associated with sewer entry, and should be read in conjunction with the NT WorkSafe Information Bulletin 02.01.01 Confined spaces - general. This bulletin has been prepared in conjunction with the Power and Water Corporation.

DO NOT ENTER SEWERS WITHOUT AUTHORISATION

Hazards that may be encountered

Gases

Hydrogen Sulphide (H2S) - Commonly known as rotten egg gas - this is highly toxic and flammable, and when in high concentrations hydrogen sulphide cannot be detected by smell and will lead to serious injury and possibly death.

Methane (CH4) - Sometimes called swamp gas. This is a flammable gas which could be ignited by sparks or other ignition sources e.g. a non-flame proof torch. This gas also displaces oxygen and is odourless, may cause instant unconsciousness if inhaled.

Lack of Oxygen (02) - In oxygen deficient atmospheres, one breath may lead to unconsciousness and possibly death. This may occur too quickly to allow escape from the sewer.

Other hazards

Sharps - e.g. used syringes and razor blades.

Risk of Infection - especially through open cuts on the skin.

Unknown Substances - chemicals and petrol when poured into sewers become a “Cocktail Mix” and may lead to fire and explosion or poisoning.

Slips/Trips/Falls - ladders and walkways in sewers are slippery, if a person falls and is injured, rescue may be delayed if other hazards are present.

Sewer entry

The atmosphere is to be tested and continually monitored. Rescue harnesses must be worn. All sewer entries are to be carried out in accordance with the Workplace Health and Safety Regulations, and AS 2865, Safe working in a confined space.

Entry to sewers is prohibited without written approval from the Power and Water Corporation.

If you need to enter a sewer contact the Operations Manager or Senior Services Coordinator (SSCD) in your area:

Darwin	Operations Manager	89245910
	SSCD	89813395
Katherine	SSCD	89738730
Tennant Creek	SSCD	89624767
Alice Springs	Operations Manager	89517249
	SSCD	89517350
Yulara	SSCD	89562617

Warning

A rescue requiring entry to a confined space should never be attempted by only one person or without a supplied air respirator. Many confined space accidents result in multiple fatalities because the rescue is unplanned and the rescuers are unprepared.

NT WorkSafe >

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