



Tractor Talks

Confined Spaces

Tips for Talking

- **Plan ahead.** Be familiar and comfortable with the topic.
- **Make it relevant.** Include related tasks and work areas or events.
- **Involve your workers.** Ask questions that lead to participation. See suggestions under "Discussion Drivers."

What went wrong?

June 26, 2:25 p.m.

Heritage Dairy has a 25 ft. square, 5 ft. deep manure pit inside a building. To say it was 31-year-old Travis's least favorite place on the farm is an understatement. Unfortunately, the pump intake pipe had clogged and Travis climbed down into the pit to clear it. While in the pit, he was overcome and collapsed. Trent was standing at the entrance of the pit and saw his older brother collapse. He hurried into the pit to help, but was also quickly overcome and collapsed. Four hours later, their dad discovered the two men in the pit and called 911. The victims were pronounced dead at the scene by the coroner. The cause of death in both cases was methane asphyxiation. **What went wrong?**

Confined Space Hazards in Farming

Farming sometimes requires workers to enter confined areas where oxygen levels may be inadequate, toxic gases are present, or physical and mechanical hazards create a risk. Before entering a confined space such as a manure pit, silo, grain bin, consider the potential hazards and how to protect yourself from injury, illness, or death. Here are some reminders of confined space hazards on farms:

- **Atmosphere Hazards.**
 - **Toxic Gases.** Gases in manure pits and silos can quickly kill. The 4 most common gases found on farms are Methane, Hydrogen sulfide, Ammonia and Carbon dioxide. All of which can cause serious health effects.
 - **Dusts and Molds.** Some dusts, especially from moldy forage, grain, or hay, can lead to severe irritation of the throat, lungs and respiratory tract. Breathing dust from moldy feed can result in a permanent lung condition commonly known as 'Farmer's Lung'.
- **Physical and Mechanical Hazards.** When the contents, materials or mechanical parts in a confined space can move or shift, workers are at risk for injury. Be sure to lock out any equipment and avoid entering grain bins while being emptied as the flowing grain can create a risk of being crushed or suffocated.

Protect Yourself from Confined Space Hazards

- Always ventilate and, if possible, use an air meter to test the space's atmosphere before entering. If testing isn't possible, use a correctly fitted, approved, self-contained breathing apparatus (SCBA).
- If a respirator is used, ensure that it fits correctly, is approved by NIOSH, and that you are trained and medically cleared to use it.
- Use harnesses and have ladders, ropes, and lifts available to use for entering and for rescue if needed.
- Maintain regular communication with the person assigned to remain outside of the space.

Discussion Drivers

1. How might the brothers' deaths have been prevented?
2. What confined spaces are you required to work in and what are their hazards?
3. Have you had the required training, fit-testing, and medical evaluation for respirator use?
4. What other hazards might be present in a confined space?

For more information on Confined Space Safety visit: <https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/confinedspaces/index.html>