

# What you don't know CAN hurt you — safety code seminars

"You find out that as good as you think your safety program is, there are certainly areas that can be beefed up to comply with the interpretation given by the Department of Commerce," says Mike Pertmer, Director of Public Works for the City of West Allis.

Pertmer had attended a seminar where specialists from the department covered 11 topics from recently revised worker safety regulations. Safety code workshops designed for supervisors and key personnel are being offered by Commerce again this fall at three or four locations.

"We would like to hear from communities around the state that are interested in hosting a seminar," says Eric Hands, Program Manager for Public Safety and Health. Municipalities are regulated under state administrative code ILHR 32 administered by the Department of Commerce. Main topics of the regulations covered in the seminars are:

- Confined spaces
- Excavations
- Flammable liquids
- Hazard communication
- Hearing conservation
- Lockout/tagout
- Machine guarding
- Personal protective equipment hazard assessments
- Street/highways safety
- Ventilation and welding
- Walking working surfaces

Personal protective equipment (PPE) is one area where many participants realized they were deficient, according to Pertmer. The code calls for analyzing each job and piece of equipment to determine what PPE is necessary. Not only must PPE be available, it also must be described in a policies and procedures manual.

Unsafe conditions are also commonly found in confined spaces, according to Andy Victoryey, Department of Commerce Health and Safety Officer. Toxic gases, like hydrogen sulfide gas and carbon monoxide, combustible



Confined spaces, like this underground tank, are one of 11 topics offered at safety seminars this fall.

gases like methane, and possible leaks of industrial hazardous materials and chemicals are the primary concerns.

"Hydrogen sulfide gas is very toxic. At 100 parts per million your sense of smell fatigues within a couple minutes and you no longer notice its distinctive

rotten egg smell. As little as 1000 parts per million is fatal with one breath. And it's also flammable," says Victoryey.

Storm sewers, tanks, silos, storage bins, hoppers, vaults, pits. Any space large enough that an employee can enter and perform assigned work, that has restricted entry or exit, and that is not designed for continuous employee occupancy is a confined space. They are categorized as level one or two with different requirements for each type.

Employers are responsible for training employees and for having written procedures on how to enter a confined space and how to rescue from one. They must also evaluate their workplaces to identify, label and lock confined spaces, excluding street manholes.

Sadly, according to Victoryey, the vast majority of confined space fatalities are rescuers rather than entrants. It is one of several areas of safety where what you don't know can not only hurt you, but might even kill you, says Pertmer.

*Dates and locations for Commerce's Code Awareness Training Seminars were not set as of newsletter deadline. For information contact Program Manager Eric Hands at 608/267-4434.*

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