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Cal/OSHA Issues Hazard Alert and Launches Confined Spaces Emphasis Program

Oakland –The California Department of Industrial Relations' Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA) today launched a statewide Confined Space Special Emphasis Initiative to focus attention on preventing worker deaths and injuries in confined spaces in worksites across the state. As part of this initiative, Cal/OSHA issued a [Confined Space Hazard Alert](#) to help employers and employees identify confined space situations and take immediate steps to protect workers.

"Employers in California are responsible for identifying and mitigating risks in the workplace," said Department of Industrial Relations Director Christine Baker. "This initiative and the Confined Space Hazard Alert provide specific information so that employers can identify when confined space hazards exist and special precautions must be taken."

Since confined spaces may be encountered in virtually any industry, their identification is the first step in preventing fatalities and injuries. The goals of the Confined Space Emphasis Initiative are to:

- Increase awareness of employees and employers of these hazards.
- Provide resources, online materials, training, and consultation to prevent injuries and deaths
- Increase enforcement efforts to ensure all employers have adequate confined space programs and training at their workplaces.

The initiative follows investigations of confined space deaths and injuries in California—in different industries and different situations. In 2011, seven workers were killed unconfined space incidents in California, including two young brothers in Kern County overcome by toxic gases in a recycling drainage tunnel.

"Confined spaces can be deceptively dangerous. It is even more tragic that over 60% of confined space worker deaths occur to would-be rescuers who attempt to save a worker who initially succumbs", said Cal/OSHA Chief Ellen Widess. "These confined space fatalities are preventable with proper programs in place. We are taking a comprehensive approach to reducing these deaths and injuries in California—through widespread education, enforcement, consultation as well as partnerships to help increase awareness and compliance."

Cal/OSHA begins its yearlong campaign on confined space hazards in collaboration with partners in labor, industry, public safety agencies and other safety and health groups. The campaign stresses the importance of the requirement that businesses have plans in place to identify confined space at their workplaces, notify and train employees, and ensure that on-site rescue plans are in place. These requirements include having a written confined space plan, procedures to test the air quality inside the space, proper employee and supervisor training prior to entering confined spaces and having effective rescue procedures in place which must be immediately available on site.

Common types of confined spaces include tanks, silos, pipelines, sewers, storage bins, drain tunnels, and vaults. These are widespread in many industries, and also in non-industrial workplaces such as health care, education, retail and services.

Cal/OSHA has posted confined space hazard materials on its website at www.dir.ca.gov/dosh. Online webinars and other outreach programs will also be held throughout the year to help educate employers become aware of the risks inherent of working in confined spaces and necessary steps to prevent injuries and deaths.

For more help on working safely in confined spaces, contact the Cal/OSHA Consultation Service toll-free at 1-800-963-9424. Also visit www.dir.ca.gov/dosh/consultation.html for more information.

Employees with work-related questions or complaints can call the California Workers' Information Hotline at 1-866-924-9757.

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