

# Confined Space Assessment – Basement Plant Rooms

The Australian National University

Sep-Nov, 2023

## Table of Contents

1	Introduction .....	3
1.1	Objective.....	3
1.2	Scope .....	3
2	Assessment Criteria .....	3
3	Confined Space Determination.....	7
3.1	Basement plant rooms .....	7
4	Entry Requirements .....	9
5	Rescue Procedures.....	10
6	Conclusion.....	10
7	Limitations .....	10
8	References .....	11

## 1 Introduction

Robson Environmental (Robson) conducted a confined space assessment on 13 September 2023, in several restricted spaces located throughout the Australian National University (ANU) campus in Acton, on behalf of ANU.

### 1.1 Objective

The purpose of this assessment was to determine if locations accessed by ANU staff and contractors are classified as confined spaces and provide tools for management of access to confined spaces.

### 1.2 Scope

The confined space assessment includes a visual inspection of the restricted areas identified by ANU, for determination of whether the area meets the classification requirements for a confined space against:

- ACT Work Health and Safety Act and Regulation, 2011;
- Australian Standard, AS2865 – 2009, Confined spaces; and
- Safe Work Australia Code of Practice – Confined Spaces 2020.

## 2 Assessment Criteria

Confined spaces are determined based on whether they meet certain criteria based on the structure and a specific set of circumstances. These criteria are stated in the Australian Standard AS 2865 – 2009: *Confined Spaces* and in the Safe Work Australia's *Confined Space Code of Practice* (2020).

There are three criteria based on the structure of the space and four criteria based on the specific set of circumstances which are:

- 1) Is space enclosed or partially enclosed? (AS 2865 – 2009, Figure 1; SWA Code of Practice (2020), Appendix B – Criteria A)**
- 2) Is space intended or designed primarily for other than human occupancy? (AS 2865: - 2009, Figure 1; SWA Code of Practice (2020), Appendix B – Criteria B)**
  - a. Places intended for human occupancy that have adequate ventilation, lighting and safe means of entry and exit are not confined spaces (Safe Work Australia, 2020).
  - b. Enclosed or partially enclosed spaces that are designed to be occasionally occupied by a person if the space has a readily and conveniently accessible means of entry and exit via a doorway at ground level are not confined spaces (Safe Work Australia, 2020).
  - c. Access points should be large enough to allow people wearing the necessary protective clothing and equipment to pass through, and to permit the rescue of all people who may enter the confined space (Safe Work Australia, 2020).
  - d. Some enclosed or partially enclosed spaces that at particular times have harmful airborne contaminants but are designed for a person to occupy, for example abrasive blasting or spray booths (Safe Work Australia, 2020).
- 3) Is the space designed or intended to be at normal atmospheric pressure while a person is in the space? (SWA Code of Practice (2020), Appendix B – Criteria C)**

- a. Where a space is not normally at atmospheric pressure (for example a boiler) it must be brought to atmospheric pressure before a person enters the space, as part of the risk control process (Safe Work Australia, 2020)
  - b. Environments where a space is not at normal atmospheric pressure, such as in decompression chambers, are not considered confined space. For spaces at pressures significantly higher or lower than the normal atmospheric pressure, expert guidance should be sought to undertake risk assessment of the space.
- 4) Has space an oxygen concentration outside the safe oxygen range? (AS 2865 – 2009, Figure 1; SWA Code of Practice (2020), Appendix B – Criteria D)**
- a. Air normally contains 21% oxygen by volume, although levels of 19.5% - 23.5% by volume are considered to be safe (Safe Work Australia, 2020).
  - b. Situations that can cause the level of oxygen to dramatically decrease, leading to an oxygen deficient atmosphere and possible asphyxiation include:
    - i. Displaced by gases produced during biological processes, for example, methane in a sewer;
    - ii. Displaced during purging of a confined space with an inert gas to remove flammable or toxic fumes;
    - iii. Depleted inside metal tanks and vessels through surface oxidation (for example, when rust forms);
    - iv. Consumed during combustion of flammable substances;
    - v. Absorbed or reacts with grains, wood chips, soil or chemicals in sealed silos.
  - c. Situations that cause the level of oxygen to dramatically increase, leading to an oxygen enriched atmosphere and increased risk of fire or explosion include:
    - i. Chemical reactions that cause the production of oxygen, for example certain reactions with hydrogen peroxide;
    - ii. Leaking of oxygen from an oxygen tank or fitting while using oxy-acetylene equipment.
- 5) Has space an airborne contaminant that may cause impairment, loss of consciousness or asphyxiation? (AS 2865 - 2009, Figure 1; SWA Code of Practice (2020), Appendix B – Criteria D)**
- a. Situations causing the build-up of harmful airborne contaminants that may cause impairment, loss of consciousness or asphyxiation include:
    - i. Substances stored in the confined space or its by-product(s) (e.g. build-up of hydrogen sulphide in sewers, pits and tanks of decomposing organic material, especially when material is disturbed);
    - ii. Work performed in the confined space (e.g. the use of paints, adhesives, solvents or cleaning products; welding or brazing with metals capable of producing toxic fumes; exhaust fumes from engines used in the confined space; painting or moulding glass-reinforced plastics);
    - iii. Entry of natural contaminants (e.g. groundwater and gases into the confined space from surrounding land, soil of strata);
    - iv. Release of airborne contaminants (e.g. when sludge, slurry or other deposits are disturbed or when scale is removed);

- v. Manufacturing process (e.g. residues left in tanks, vessels etc., or remaining on internal surfaces can evaporate into a gas or vapour);
  - vi. Entry and accumulation of gases and liquids from adjacent plant, installations, services or process.
- 6) Has space an airborne contaminant that may cause injury from fire or explosion? (AS 2865 – 2009, Figure 1, SWA Code of Practice (2020), Appendix B – Criteria D)**
- a. A flammable atmosphere is one in which the flammable gas, vapour or mist is likely to exceed 5% of its lower explosive limit (LEL);
  - b. Situations causing flammable atmospheres include:
    - i. Evaporation of a flammable residue;
    - ii. Flammable materials used in the space;
    - iii. A chemical reaction (such as the formation of methane in sewers);
    - iv. The presence of combustible dust (such as flour silos).
- 7) Has space a stored free flowing solid or a rising level of liquid that may cause suffocation or drowning by engulfment? (AS 2865 – 2009, Figure 1; SWA Code of Practice (2020), Appendix B – Criteria D)**
- a. Engulfment is the immersion or envelopment of a person by a solid or liquid (e.g. grain, sugar, flour, sand, coal, fertilizer and other substances in a powder or granular form) that is stored within the confined space (AS 2865:2009).

Figure 1 is the flowchart taken from the *Confined Spaces Code of Practice* (Safe Work Australia, 2020) which demonstrates the process for identifying whether an area is a confined space or not based on the WHS Regulations (2011). For a space to be confirmed as a confined space, the answers to criteria 1, 2 and 3 and at least one of 4, 5, 6, and 7 must be 'Yes.' If the answer to any of the criteria 1, 2, and 3 is 'No', the area is not a confined space, and the remaining criteria do not need to be applied.

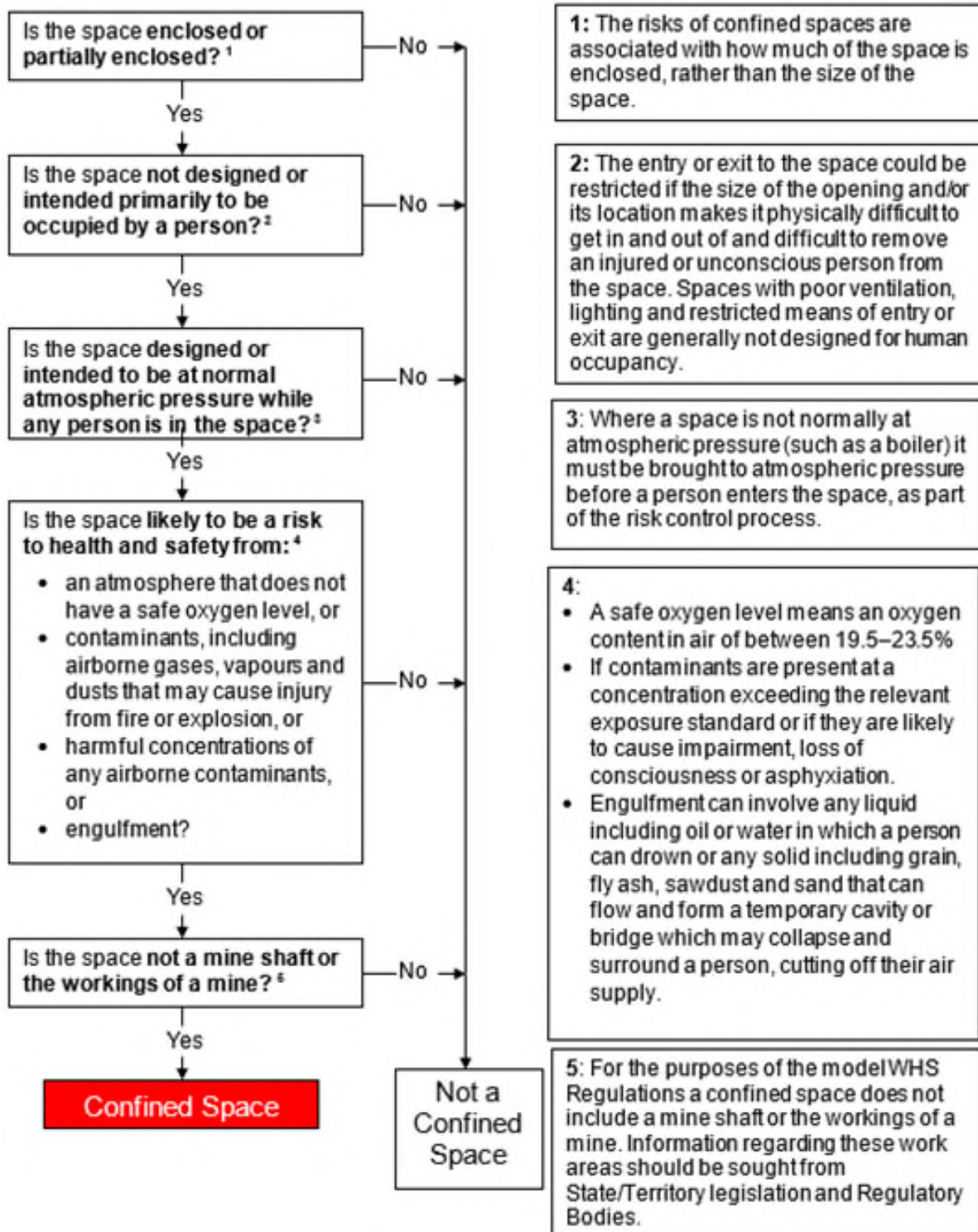


Figure 1: Flowchart to determine if area is a Confined Space (Safe Work Australia, 2020)



### 3 Confined Space Determination

#### 3.1 Basement plant rooms

The basement plant rooms that were inspected are located at the tunnels under the old physics building and at ground level access on the other side of the old physics building of the ANU campus. The basement plant rooms are accessed for maintenance and repair by ANU workers and contractors as required.

The access points are at either via the tunnels or rear entry to the building down the stairs of the old physics building (Figure 2). Figure 3 shows the natural gas alarm system to alert workers when level of natural gas is no longer considered safe in the plant room. This was only fitted in the plant room at the rear of the old physics building that houses the heating systems for the building.

There is sufficient lighting and ventilation when access is required, however the basement plant room in the tunnel (Figure 2) could be susceptible to poor ventilation. There is no access by the public.



**Figure 2 Behind Old Physics Building**



**Figure 3: Natural gas detection alarm**

**Table 1: Confined Space Determination for the Australian National University – Basement Plant Rooms**

Criteria	Determination	Justification
1. Is the space enclosed or partially enclosed?	No	The basement plant rooms are located within the tunnel under the old physics building or at the rear of the building via the internal stair access. These areas are not considered enclosed or partially enclosed.
<b>As the answer is 'Yes', the area could be confined space, and Criteria 2 must be addressed</b>		
2. Is space intended or designed primarily for other than human occupancy?	Yes	The plant rooms can be easily accessed by workers from via access through the tunnels and stairwells. However there is potential for build-up of hazardous gases which could affect the occupancy of the space. There is lighting available, and ventilation designed to support human occupancy.
<b>As the answer is 'Yes', the area could be confined space, and Criteria 3 must be addressed</b>		
3. Is space designed or intended to be at normal atmospheric pressure while a person is in the space?	Yes	Space is designed to be at normal atmospheric pressure.
<b>As the answer is 'Yes', the area could be confined space, and Criteria 4 – 7 must be addressed</b>		



Criteria	Determination	Justification
4. Has space an oxygen concentration outside the safe oxygen range?	No	Although oxygen levels at the access points are at atmospheric concentrations, there is potential for chemical build up if natural gases leak. However there are warning systems prior to entry to the rear building plant room.
5. Has space an airborne contaminant that may cause impairment, loss of consciousness or asphyxiation?	No	Although no airborne contaminants were measured during the assessment on 13 September, 2023, the presence of harmful gases present a potential for build-up of harmful airborne contaminants that may cause impairment, loss of consciousness or asphyxiation. However, the leaking gas warning system will alert workers before entry.
6. Has space an airborne concentration that may cause injury from fire or explosion?	Yes	If the natural gas alert system fails to warn workers of build-up of explosive gases, there is a risk the environment may cause injury from fire or explosion. The use of a multi gas confined space detector should be worn and used continuously during entry to the basement plant room, to provide an additional level of protection.
7. Has space a stored free flowing solid or a rising level of liquid that may cause suffocation or drowning by engulfment?	No	There is not expected to be a risk from free flowing liquids or solids in the basement plant rooms.
Final Assessment		
Whilst the Basement Plant rooms do not meet the typical criteria of a confined space – not enclosed or partially enclosed, there are other criteria 2, 3, and 6 that should be considered as well. Based on this it <b>does</b> meet the criteria for classification as a confined space.		

## 4 Entry Requirements

Access to the confined space mentioned in the determination above should be restricted to qualified and authorised ANU staff or contractors with the following control measures implemented:

1. When works involving the basement plant rooms are being conducted, appropriate signage and barricades should be erected to prevent public access.
2. A register of workers/contractors in the space should be provided to a central point, i.e. nearby building in case of emergency.
3. Real-time multi gas monitors should be used to determine the air quality at the entrance, mid level and bottom of the confined space before any entry by workers or contractors takes place.
4. Prior to the commencement of any works in a confined space, the ANU supervisor must be contacted by the workers.

5. Before the commencement of works, workers must check the ANU AED location map and familiarise themselves with the closest AED.

## 5 Rescue Procedures

1. Immediately contact 000 in an emergency
2. All workers or contractors accessing the confined space should be wearing continuous air monitoring devices (one per work group is sufficient).
3. Allocation of additional workers should be present when works are undertaken in the confined space, to observe the workers and organise rescue effort in the event of an emergency.
4. A defibrillator and first aid kit should be made available when a worker or contractor is entering the confined space in the event someone is requiring medical assistance.
5. Rescue equipment in the form of tripod winch and body harnesses should be used for any contractor or worker entering the confined space.
6. A documented rescue plan for works in the confined space should be developed prior to access and discussed with all workers. This could be a generic plan that can be adopted for all workers accessing the basement plant rooms.

## 6 Conclusion

Robson Environmental undertook a Confined Space Assessment in various areas of the ANU campus, against the assessment criteria given in the Safe Work Australia *Confined Spaces Code of Practice* (2020) and Australian Standard 2865 (2009) *Confined Spaces*.

According to these criteria and the information gathered during the site inspection, the basement plant rooms are **classified as a confined space**. Due to the potential risk to workers accessing the basement plant rooms if there is a failure of controls or build-up of airborne contaminants, the control measures listed in Section 4 should be implemented to ensure the safety of contractors and workers who require access to these areas for maintenance or repairs.

## 7 Limitations

While Robson has taken all care to ensure that this report includes the most accurate information available, samples were taken at certain times on the day or days indicated within the report and Robson is unable to comment on conditions at other times. Any statement of expected conditions at other times should be taken as possible conditions only.

The report, including any risk assessment presented, is based on the information obtained by Robson at the time of sampling. Any variation in the environment, activities, methods, practices, products, or equipment used may change exposures to hazards, invalidating the presented risk assessment. Robson recommends that risks be re-assessed prior to making any changes to the aforementioned factors.

The findings contained within this report are developed from the interpretation of the results of specific sampling methods used in accordance with generally accepted practices and standards, based on the current state of knowledge. To the best of Robson's knowledge, our assessment of the data represents a reasonable interpretation of the general conditions, and subsequent risk at the time of

sampling. Should you have any questions or require further information please contact Robson Environmental.

## **8 References**

- Safe Work Australia 2020, *Confined Spaces - Code of Practice*, Safe Work Australia.
- Standards Australia 2009, *Confined Spaces, AS 2865 – 2009*, Standards Australia.
- *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* (ACT)
- *Work Health and Safety Regulations 2011* (ACT)