

RISK ASSESSMENT · UNITED KINGDOM · 2026

Confined Space Risk Assessment

UK template and structure for a Confined Spaces Regulations 1997 risk assessment — atmospheric testing, top-man, emergency arrangements.

A confined space risk assessment under the Confined Spaces Regulations 1997 is one of the most heavily scrutinised documents in UK construction. It carries a specific statutory duty to identify the specified risks (fire / explosion, loss of consciousness from heat, gas / fumes / vapour, drowning, asphyxiation, free-flowing solids) and to demonstrate that entry is genuinely necessary. Reviewers reject these documents quickly when the 'avoid entry' option has not been seriously considered.

Document structure a reviewer expects

- 1. Confined space determination**
Apply the regulation 1(2) two-part test and record the conclusion in writing.
- 2. Avoid-entry justification**
Document why entry is necessary — what alternatives were considered and rejected.
- 3. Specified risks**
Identify which of the six specified risks (fire / consciousness / gas / drowning / asphyxiation / free-flowing solids) apply.
- 4. Atmospheric testing and monitoring**
Gas detector model, calibration regime, alarm set-points, pre-entry and continuous monitoring procedure.
- 5. Safe system of work**
Step-by-step entry sequence, isolation procedure, communication method, work duration limit.
- 6. Emergency arrangements (reg 5)**
Top-man, rescue equipment on site, named trained rescuers, resuscitation equipment, maximum rescue time.
- 7. PPE and respiratory protection**
Self-contained breathing apparatus or escape sets — model, RPE face-fit records, inspection dates.
- 8. Permit-to-work reference**
Cross-reference to the entry permit that authorises the work and records sign-on / sign-off.
- 9. Briefing and competence**
Names of entrants, top-man and rescuers with their City & Guilds 6160 or equivalent confined space training certificates.

Common reasons reviewers reject this document

- Avoid-entry duty (reg 4(1)) not addressed — the document goes straight to PPE without showing alternatives were considered.
- Atmospheric alarm set-points missing or wrong. Standard set-points are 19.5%/23.5% O₂, 10% LEL, 35 ppm CO, 5 ppm H₂S.

- Rescue plan relies on the fire and rescue service with no on-site rescue capability or stated maximum response time.
- Top-man role described but no explicit prohibition on the top-man entering the space.
- No reference to gas detector bump-test / calibration records or RPE face-fit testing.
- Confined space determination not made — the document assumes the space is in scope rather than applying the reg 1(2) test.

UK regulation reference

Confined Spaces Regulations 1997 SI 1997/1713

The primary statutory framework — avoid-entry duty, safe system, rescue duty.

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/1997/1713/contents/made>

L101 — Safe work in confined spaces (ACoP and guidance) HSE L101

Approved Code of Practice for the 1997 Regulations — the benchmark reviewers use.

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/books/l101.htm>

INDG258 — Safe work in confined spaces HSE INDG258

Plain-English summary; sets the standard for the rescue regime referenced in most assessments.

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg258.htm>

CDM 2015 SI 2015/51

Imposes the principal contractor's duty to plan and monitor work — including confined space entry.

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/51/contents/made>

Frequently asked questions

Is a roof void or loft a confined space?

Only if a specified risk is reasonably foreseeable inside it. A typical domestic loft is not in scope. A commercial roof void with insulation off-gassing, residual asbestos, or a sealed plant chamber with potential gas accumulation may be — the test is the risk profile, not the geometry.

Can the same person act as top-man and rescuer?

No. The top-man stays outside, maintains communication, and never enters the space under any circumstances — entering to attempt a rescue is the most common cause of multi-fatality confined space incidents in UK statistics. The rescuer is a separate, trained operative on site (or, where the system of work allows, the dedicated rescue team arranged in advance).

Do I need a permit-to-work as well as a risk assessment?

In practice yes for most confined spaces. The risk assessment establishes the system of work; the permit authorises a specific entry under that system, records the gas test results at entry time, and provides the sign-on / sign-off audit trail. Most principal contractors will not accept a confined space entry without both documents.

What gas detector is required?

The 1997 Regulations don't specify a make or model — they require a system of work that controls atmospheric risk. In practice that means a 4-gas detector (O₂, LEL, CO, H₂S) at minimum, bump-tested before each shift, full calibration within the manufacturer's interval (commonly 6 months), with a documented calibration record.

Does the Confined Spaces ACoP apply to deep excavations?

Yes where the excavation meets the regulation 1(2) test — typically deep excavations with potential gas ingress from contaminated ground, sewer connections, or asphyxiating gases from soil bacteria. A simple open trench in clean ground is not in scope; a deep chamber excavation adjacent to a live sewer almost always is.

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