A Health and Safety Guide for Your Workplace

Work Permits

What is a Work Permit?

A work permit is a written form used to authorize jobs that expose workers to serious hazards. It identifies the work to be done, the hazards involved, and the necessary preparation and precautions for the job. Examples of the jobs needing work permits are those requiring employees to enter and work in confined spaces, to repair, maintain or inspect electrical installations or to use large or complex equipment.

Why use a Work Permit?

When a job has the potential of causing serious injuries or death, it is necessary to formalize agreed upon work procedures. This prevents instructions from being missed, forgotten or misinterpreted. It also serves as a checklist to ensure that all hazards, protective measures, work procedures and general requirements are reviewed with and understood by the assigned worker(s).

A work permit serves as a record of the authorization and completion of specific work. The authorization must be provided by a competent person after all the necessary conditions have been met.

When is a Work Permit Needed?

You should use a work permit when there is danger from:

- fire
- sparks from open flames, welding, cutting, furnaces, etc.
- explosive, corrosive or toxic gases or atmospheres
- pressure systems
- steam or other hot materials (burns)
- electricity and other energy sources
- accidental start-up of mechanical equipment
- oxygen deficiency or oxygen enrichment
- suffocation or drowning (for example, in bulk material bins or solvent storage tanks)
- restricted access, exit and movement
- toxic substances
- radioactive materials
- lasers
- temperature extremes
- any other recognized serious safety or health hazard

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Types of Work Permits

Depending upon the job, you should use one of the following types of permits:

Hot Work Permits

Issued for work using or generating heat that is sufficient to ignite gases, vapours, dusts, etc. Some examples are welding, flame cutting and metal drilling.

Safety Permits

Issued when work involves steam, water, air or electricity. Safety permits are also needed when repair or maintenance work requires the locking out of energy sources.

Entry Permits

Used when workers are required to enter and work in confined spaces such as silos, tanks or pits. These permits are often combined with the other permits described here, depending upon the nature of the work to be carried out in the confined space.

Unique Permits

Issued when work involves hazardous conditions such as working near radioactive materials, working at heights or carrying out other specialized work.

General Permits

Issued for highly hazardous jobs of a more general nature that are not covered by any of the permits described above.

How is a Work Permit System Set Up?

Here is a suggested action plan for you to follow if you are planning to set up a work permit system or to formalize or improve your existing system.

Work with your joint health and safety committee or health and safety representative in setting up the system, and document all stages of the process.

Establish Your Policy

Your policy should:

- emphasize the importance of a work permit (it's easier to implement a policy when employees understand why it's needed)
- specify that a work permit will be needed for all high risk work activities
- identify the person or team who will manage the process

Identify Hazards, Assess Risk and Determine Needs

- Identify work activities requiring a work permit and the type of permit needed. One way is to do a job hazard analysis of all critical tasks.
- Review legislative requirements, codes and standards, and industry practices.
- Assess risks based on severity of hazards and number of people exposed, and prioritize work permit needs based on this assessment.
- Identify the resources needed to set up and maintain the system.

Implement a Plan to Address Identified Needs

- Develop and implement a strategy to successfully achieve the required control.
- Define responsibilities, accountabilities, timelines and milestones for the Work Permit system.

Set Standards

Develop standards against which to measure the effectiveness of the system. The standards should cover:

- scope of the system
- qualifications of persons involved in the system
- responsibilities and accountabilities
- reporting and record keeping
- work permit priorities

Develop Procedures

Your procedures should:

- clearly identify the kinds of jobs requiring work permits
- explain how the permit system works, for example:
  - when to apply for a permit (how many hours before the work is started?)
  - where to get a permit
  - how to fill it out (see inset **Information to Include in Your Work Permit**, and the sample permit on page 6)
  - how many copies are needed
  - who gets copies
  - who must be informed of the work
  - what to do with the permit when work is stopped or completed
- Define responsibilities, for example:
  - who fills out the form
  - who identifies hazards
  - who ensures precautions have been taken
  - who is authorized to issue/revoke permits
  - who supervises the work
  - who ensures work is completed

Information to Include in Your Work Permit

- name(s) of worker(s)
- exact work locations
- work to be done
- date and time the work is to start and end
- hazards
- preparatory requirements, such as testing, equipment and machinery to be shut down/locked out, ventilation, etc.
- correct sequence of work procedures
- personal protective equipment required
- emergency equipment needed
- a telephone number to call for help, and where the nearest phone is located
- signature of authorized person(s)
- signature of worker(s) to indicate that they understand the hazards involved and know the precautions to be taken
- date and time the permit is issued

See sample work permit on page 6

Communicate your Policy and Procedures

When you have finalized your policy and procedures, ensure that they are communicated to all employees and others affected, e.g., contractors.

Provide Training

No matter how well designed your work permit system is, it will only succeed if your staff understand how to comply with it.

Identify all employees who need training and the training content (See *Training Program Content Guidelines* for suggestions on what your training program should cover). Provide training, preferably as a group, to all possible users and staff involved in the system.

Provide training before new technology or processes are used. Follow up with periodic refresher training to cover experiences with the permit system, suggestions for improvement and staff changes.

Measure and Evaluate

It is important to monitor and evaluate your work permit system to ensure that it is being followed correctly and that it is effective.

Include your work permit procedures as part of your workplace inspections. Also consult your staff on the effectiveness of the system and consider their suggestions on how to improve it.

Review your work permit system at least every six months. This will involve, for example, an evaluation of the results of:

- in-plant spot checks that work permits are being used and complied with properly
- tests to establish a person's competence to qualify as authorized signer
- review of completed work permit forms
- detailed investigation and analysis of all incidents involving work permits

Continually Improve the System

Make sure you have a plan in place to immediately correct deficiencies and to improve the system. This should also be an opportunity to recognize good performance.

Ensuring a Successful Work Permit System

A weak work permit system offers little or no protection and may lead to serious consequences.

Here are some things to consider when you are setting up your system.

- Ensure that your work permit system is clear to all staff (See *Training Program Content Guidelines*).
- Don't allow work to start without a permit.
- Issue permits in a timely manner; not too long before the job. Conditions in the work area can change easily within days.
- Design the permit to be as job-specific as possible so that it is appropriate to the work.
- Ensure that each work permit is clearly written. Poor communication can cause mistakes and acidents.
- Verify that all requirements and conditions are complied with before signing the permit. The signer of the permit must have appropriate qualifications. Other signers should include the supervisor of the workers assigned to the job, the supervisor of the work area and the workers assigned to the job.
- Before workers sign the permit, make sure that they understand the hazards involved and know the precautions to take. Inform them that the work permit takes priority over any other instructions.
- Also ensure that workers know when the permit expires, and comply with it. This requires supervision as workers may tend to continue working until the job is completed.
- Distribute several copies of the permit to appropriate personnel. For example, provide one copy for the worksite, one for the authorized signer, and one for the supervisor of the work area.
- Ensure that emergency personnel (fire, first aid, rescue, etc.) are advised of the work and its exact location. Devise emergency plans for the job and have rescue equipment ready in the event of an accident.
- Post signs and use barriers in the work area to keep out unauthorized persons, pedestrians and vehicles.

- Implement field checks to ensure that every detail of the permit is being followed. If conditions at the work site change, notify the designated supervisor ant stop all work. Cancel the permit and reissue another only when additional safeguards are implemented.
- When the work is completed or the time limit expires, forward the worksite copy to the supervisor of the workers assigned to the job. The permit should indicate the status of the job. The supervisor must verify that all post-completion requirements are complied with before canceling the permit.
- If the work is subcontracted, make sure the contractor is aware of the hazards. Ensure that the contractor understands and complies with your safety requirements and emergency procedures. Don't relax your permit policy and procedures with contractors. They are less familiar with your facilities and therefore need greater protection.
- Don't overuse the work permit system. Issue a permit only when necessary to avoid having it regarded as nothing more than administrative paperwork.

Training Program Content

Your training program should include the following areas:

- An explanation for how the work permit system can help prevent accidents, injuries and death.
- The duties and responsibilities of each party. Emphasize that team work is critical. The person filling out the form, the person preparing the work area, and the person doing the job must understand the procedures and carry out their responsibilities thoroughly for the system to work.
- Hazard identification and hazard reporting. Workers should be able to recognize the early warning signs and symptoms of the presence of a hazard. For example, an odour similar to rotten eggs may indicate exposure to hydrogen sulfide. Workers should know the procedures for reporting hazards.
- The importance of the health and safety precautions. Workers should understand that ignoring these endangers not only themselves but also the rescue team. There have been several cases where rescuers have been injured or killed.
- What to do in an emergency. Workers must be instructed to stop work and evacuate the area immediately if:
  - ordered to do so by an authorized person
  - a fire or evacuation alarm sounds
  - they believe they are in danger
- Training for rescuers on the safe use of equipment, emergency entrance and exit procedures. Conduct drills to test their proficiency on rescue procedures and first aid.
- Special training for supervisors to ensure they are able to determine that working conditions are safe at all times.

IN AN EMERGENCY CALL:

_____

Telephone is located at

_____

Sample Work Permit

This sample permit is a guideline only. Modify it to make it appropriate to the work to be done and to suit your needs.

Valid only for work described on the permit

Permit valid for: Date _____ Time _____
Permit expires: Date _____ Time _____
Number of workers _____
Work Description _____

Work Location _____
Shift supervisor's signature _____

Hazards Identified/Precautions	Done (initials)	Comments
Pre-work requirements		
Equipment locked out?		
Atmospheric conditions tested for safety?		
Stand-by guard posted?		
Emergency rescue procedures reviewed?		
Work requirements		
Area barricaded, roped off, signs posted?		
Personal protective equipment adequate?		
Emergency crew advised?		
First aid readily available?		
Post-work requirements		
Tools and equipment removed from work area?		

Where atmospheric tests are required, indicate results of tests:

Oxygen _____ % Comments _____
Flammability _____ % Comments _____
Toxicity _____ PPM Comments _____
Signature of tester _____ Date _____ Time _____

All requirements must be completed before issuing this permit. Permit issuer or designated representative is responsible for checking conditions while work is in progress.

Permit approved by

Signature _____ Date _____ Time _____
Signature _____ Date _____ Time _____

Worker

I have read the permit and understand the nature and extent of the work. I agree to comply with all safety precautions.

Name _____ Signature _____ Date _____
Name _____ Signature _____ Date _____

Completion	Yes	No	Comments
Work completed?			
All safeguards returned to normal?			
Requirements after work complied with?			

Verified by Supervisor
Signature _____ Date _____ Time _____

MAINTENANCE COPY – to be kept at worksite and returned to workers' supervisor when job is completed or when permit expires.

What the Law Says

The following sections of the ***Regulation for Industrial Establishments*** cover situations for which work permits would be necessary:

- S.42 Electrical equipment, work procedures
- S.50 Entering silos, bins, etc.
- Ss.67-71 Confined spaces
- S.76 Locking out machinery

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