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Farm safety - confined spaces

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Summary

- Enclosed or partly enclosed structures on farms such as silos, vats, tanks, pits or poorly ventilated rooms can suffocate a person with fumes, dust or low oxygen levels.
- Without a proper rescue plan and safety equipment, rescuers coming to the aid of someone who has collapsed inside a confined space can become overcome too.
- The safest approach with any confined space is to avoid going in there.
- Organisations such as WorkSafe Victoria can offer valuable advice on improving health and safety on your farm.

Any confined space on a farm poses a potentially life-threatening hazard, because the threat may not be apparent until it's too late. Silos, vats, tanks, wells, manure pits and other enclosed or partly enclosed structures can suffocate a person with vapours, toxic gases, dust or low oxygen levels.

Inexperienced or untrained rescuers coming to the aid of someone who has collapsed inside a confined space are usually exposed to the risk too. It is not unusual for numerous members of the same family to be killed in a single confined space accident.

The dangers of confined spaces on farms

Harmful fumes or low oxygen atmospheres are common in many confined spaces on farms. There is also the risk of suffocation inside a silo if stored grain or fertiliser collapses. The safest approach with any confined space is to avoid going in there.

In many instances, tasks such as cleaning or maintenance can be achieved using other means that don't require entry into the confined space. If it is necessary for someone to go inside the confined space, consider hiring a contractor who is trained and experienced.

If you have no other option but to go inside the confined space yourself, be sure to take all the safety precautions you can, ensure you aren't working alone and that another person knows that you are planning to do this. Talk to [WorkSafe Victoria](#) first for valuable and potentially life-saving advice.

Confined spaces on farms

Any of the following places on farms can be confined spaces, and can be hazardous.

Rooms, garages and sheds as confined spaces

Potentially, any room or garage without adequate ventilation can become a confined space (for example, using a generator for power in a room or running a petrol/diesel engine in an enclosed garage).

Silos

A person can be buried and asphyxiated (suffocated) by falling feed, grain or fertiliser inside a silo. Safety suggestions include:

- Use a drier feed so you don't have to unblock the auger discharge, or find ways to mix the feed so that it won't crust.
- Clear blockages from the outside through a hatch.
- Fit vibration systems or turbulence valves.
- Prevent moisture getting in and caking the feed by fitting and maintaining seals.
- If you have to go inside, use a strong safety line and harness and switch off mechanical devices like the auger. Always work with someone when doing this.
- Never enter a silo if working alone.
- Remember that dusts and fumes can exacerbate asthma, so ensure necessary personal protective equipment (PPE) is also worn.

Vats

Safety suggestions for vats include:

- Be sure there are no harmful substances inside.
- Turn off the power to the vat before entry.
- Always have a responsible second person on site who can see inside and is capable of a rescue procedure.

Underground tunnels and wells

Children can be attracted to wells and tunnels as interesting places to play. Safety suggestions include:

- Cover or fence entrances securely and post warning signs.
- Warn children of the dangers.
- Make wells and underground tunnels strictly out of bounds as play areas.
- Avoid entering tunnels and wells.

Water tanks

Keep out of water tanks by finding other ways to empty, repair and clean them. Safety suggestions include:

- Put a lid on the tank so animals and debris can't fall in.
- Fit an external pump or an automated self-cleaning system.
- Install taps in above-ground tanks.
- Try cleaning out the tank from the outside, using high-pressure hoses.
- Don't use petrol-powered pumps inside the tank.
- Hire a professional when required.

Generators/petrol or diesel motors

Using a generator for power without any ventilation means that you are at risk from asphyxiation from fumes.

Generators should always be located outdoors to prevent serious consequences from [carbon monoxide poisoning](#).

When running any diesel or petrol motors, always ensure adequate ventilation.

Sewers and manure pits

Gases such as methane and hydrogen sulphide can build up inside manure pits and displace the oxygen. Safety suggestions include:

- Cover pits securely and post warning signs.
- Include natural or mechanical ventilation in the pit's design.
- Try to devise ways to clean the pit from the outside.
- Keep ignition sources (such as sparks or flames) well away from the pit, as methane and hydrogen sulphide are flammable.
- If you must go inside the pit, wear self-contained breathing apparatus or an airline respirator or, better still, get a trained contractor to undertake the work. Take all necessary precautions.

Rescue attempts can be fatal

Our first impulse when seeing a person in danger is to help them. However, entering a confined space with dangerous fumes or low oxygen levels can overcome and kill the rescuers too.

Never attempt a rescue unless you have a proper rescue plan and the right safety equipment, such as breathing apparatus. Otherwise, call on emergency services personnel, who are professionally trained and equipped.

Draw up a farm emergency plan

An emergency plan for the whole family and farm is vital. Some suggestions include:

- Seek advice from [WorkSafe Victoria](#) on how to safely deal with the confined spaces on your farm.
- Ensure easy access to a suitable [first aid kit](#).
- Make sure at least one person on the farm is trained in first aid.
- Keep emergency numbers and correct addresses next to the telephone.
- Plan routes to the nearest hospital that has an emergency department.
- Regularly talk through your emergency plan with your family and other workers.
- Make sure your children understand what to do in an emergency.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- In an emergency, always call triple zero (000) for an ambulance
- [National Centre for Farmer Health](#) Tel. (03) 5551 8533
- [WorkSafe Victoria](#) Tel. (03) 9641 1444 or 1800 136 089
- [WorkSafe Victoria - confined spaces](#)
- [Farmsafe Australia](#) Tel. (02) 6269 5666

[References](#)

- *Confined spaces*, WorkSafe Victoria, Victorian WorkCover Authority, Australia. [More information here](#).

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Safety basics

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[If you are bitten or stung by an insect or animal, apply first aid and seek medical treatment as soon as possible...](#)
- [How to survive a rip current \(video\)](#)
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Child safety

- [Animals and child safety](#)
[Children should always be closely supervised near animals and taught how to behave safely around pets...](#)
- [Babies and safety](#)
[Most injuries to babies do not occur by chance - many are predictable and largely preventable...](#)
- [Baby care - moving from cot to bed](#)
[Some children are unsettled the first few nights in a 'big bed'. Try to be patient, loving and reassuring...](#)
- [Baby furniture - safety tips](#)
[Even if your baby furniture meets every safety standard and recommendation, your child still needs close supervision...](#)
- [Bicycle safety and children](#)
[As they grow and develop, and with the help of adults, children become increasingly aware of how they can manage their own safety and become safer road and bicycle users...](#)
- [Burns and scalds - children](#)
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- [Mobile phone safety for children](#)

[Teach your child strategies for responding to mobile phone bullying...](#)

- [Playgrounds and child safety](#)

[Play environments can be safe and beneficial for your child. With proper planning, you can make sure your child gets plenty of playtime activity...](#)

- [Poisoning and child safety](#)

[Call the Poisons Information Centre on 13 11 26 immediately if you suspect your child has been poisoned or given the wrong medicine or the wrong dose of medicine...](#)

- [Road and traffic safety for children](#)

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- [Scooters and child safety](#)

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- [Water safety for children](#)

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- [Animals and child safety](#)

[Children should always be closely supervised near animals and taught how to behave safely around pets...](#)

- [Asbestos in the home](#)

[Asbestos fibres breathed into the lungs can cause a range of health problems including lung cancer and mesothelioma...](#)

- [Chemicals in the home](#)

[Learn how to safely store and dispose of household chemicals, and how to respond when a person is poisoned...](#)

- [Electric shock](#)

[Always disconnect the power supply before trying to help a victim of electric shock...](#)

- [Gas heating - health and safety issues](#)

[If you service your gas heater regularly and use it correctly, it will be safe and economical to use...](#)

- [Greywater - recycling water at home](#)

[When handled properly, greywater can be safely reused for the garden...](#)

- [Groundwater](#)

[Groundwater quality varies across Victoria; in some areas, groundwater is not suitable for use...](#)

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- [Ladder safety matters – Nick \(video\)](#)

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[Paul was sanding the exterior of his house when he overreached and fell more than two metres from his ladder...](#)

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[Make sure your doctor knows about every medicine you take, including vitamins...](#)

- [Older people – preventing falls at home](#)

[Falls are a major cause of injury for older people. Find out how you can prevent falls around your home...](#)

- [Pest control in the home](#)

[If you use pesticides to control pests around the house, make sure you use as little as possible...](#)

- [Swimming pools - water quality](#)

[Check your swimming pool regularly to make sure the water is safe for swimming...](#)

- [Vision loss - safety around the home](#)

[There are many ways to improve home safety for people whose vision is deteriorating...](#)

- [Water quality in tanks, bores and dams](#)

[Make sure your private drinking water supply is safe...](#)

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[Teach your child strategies for responding to mobile phone bullying...](#)

- [Partying safely – tips for teenagers](#)

[Don't advertise a party via SMS or the internet to limit the risk of gate-crashers and violent situations...](#)

- [Solariums \(sunbeds and tanning beds\)](#)

[There is no such thing as a safe solarium tan...](#)

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- [Exercise safety](#)

[Training too hard or fast is a common cause of sports-related injuries...](#)

- [Heat stress and heat-related illness](#)

[Heat kills more Australians than any natural disaster. Find out how you can treat and prevent heat-related illness...](#)

- [Heat stress and older people](#)

[People aged 65 years and over are at increased risk of heat-related illnesses and need special care in hot weather...](#)

- [Heat stress – preventing heatstroke](#)

[Heatstroke is a life-threatening emergency that can be avoided by following simple prevention measures...](#)

- [Hot weather and child safety](#)

[Babies and children can quickly lose body fluids in hot weather, which can lead to dehydration...](#)

- [How to cope and stay safe in extreme heat](#)

[Know the effects of extreme heat, who is at risk and how you can prepare yourself and others...](#)

- [How to survive a rip current \(video\)](#)

[Learn what to do if you find yourself in a rip current...](#)

- [Hypothermia](#)

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- [Walking - safety and environmental issues](#)

[Choose a route that is appropriate for your age and fitness level. Warm up and cool down with a slow, gentle pace to ease in and out of your exercise session...](#)

- [Water from natural resources](#)

[Drinking untreated water, such as creek water, bore water and sometimes even rainwater can lead to illnesses including gastroenteritis...](#)

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[Safe driving is up to every individual on the road. You can be a safe driver by being alert and ready to take action at any time...](#)

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[You can reduce your risk of being mugged or robbed while travelling by taking a few simple precautions...](#)

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[When returning to your home after a flood, take precautions to reduce the possibility of injury, illness or disease...](#)

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[Houses, sheds and other buildings or structures burnt in a bushfire can leave potential health hazards...](#)

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[Bushfire smoke can reduce air quality in rural and urban areas, and may affect people's health...](#)

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[Children can be affected by information regarding bushfire risk and they may become concerned about issues of safety. Talking to children openly in a way that suits their age, while also involving...](#)
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Last updated: November 2016

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