

Loss Prevention Standards

Permit to Work Systems

Introduction

Permit to work systems are essentially formal, documented safe systems of work. They are usually used where the potential hazard is significant and a formal documented system is appropriate to control the work. The aim is to remove both unsafe conditions and human error by imposing a formal system which requires formal action.

Operation of the Permit to Work System

Examples of work in which a permit to work system should be used include the following activities:

- Entry into confined spaces
- Work involving the splitting or breaking into of pressurised pipelines
- Work on high voltage electrical systems above 3000 volts
- Hot work, e.g. welding, brazing, soldering, etc.
- Work in isolated situations or where access is difficult, or at height
- Work near to, or requiring the use of highly flammable/explosive/toxic substances
- Fumigation operations using gases
- High risk operations involving contractors, such as excavation works

Designing the Permit to Work System

Good permit to work systems are based on robust safe systems of work which have the best physical controls to prevent danger, as well as good standards of organisation to ensure compliance.

Permits should ensure that control measures are available for both 'routine' and 'one-off' situations. Examples may be fire extinguishers being available for hot work, or harnesses and resuscitation equipment available when entering confined spaces.

In designing and introducing permit to work systems, the following key questions should be considered:

What is the potential hazard?

- What is the worst case situation?
- What can go wrong?

What degree of control is needed?

- At what stages are formal decisions to be made, e.g. at the beginning of the work, before entry into the vessel, before the contractor is allowed in?

Will the permit incorporate a checklist?

- If hot work is being controlled, has a checklist of precautions been produced?

Who are the authorities?

- At what stages are signatures needed?
- What level of expertise is required?

How are the permit instructions set out?

- Are notes included in the permit to work book?

- Are authorised persons listed?

What are the training arrangements?

- How are authorised persons trained?
- How is competence measured?
- How are employee groups trained?

How is the permit system communicated to others?

- How are contractors informed and monitored?

How is the permit system audited?

- Is the permit to work system regularly audited to ensure compliance with procedures?

Permit to work systems should be designed so that they work within the organisation. The permit system will only guarantee safety if the original safe system of work which it documents is adequate and if the system is followed by all involved. In other words, deviation from the work specified on the permit must never occur.

Key Action Steps

Permit to work forms should incorporate the following features:

- The permit must specify who is to do the work, the time for which it is valid, the work to be done and the necessary precautions
- During the permit, no person shall work on any equipment not covered by the permit
- No person shall carry out work which is not authorised by the permit. If there is to be a change in the work, the permit must be amended/cancelled. This can only be done by the authorised originator of the permit
- There must be liaison with other work areas whose activities could be affected by the permit system
- Where the permit to work is to be carried out on part of a site or on specific equipment, the limits of the work must be clearly marked
- Permits must take into account all contractors on site, who should be briefed prior to the commencement of work

Additional Information

- [Aviva Hot Work Operations Loss Prevention Standard](#)
- [Guidance on Permit-to-Work Systems: HSG250](#) – Health and Safety Executive
- [Permit to Work Systems](#) – Health and Safety Executive
- [Confined Spaces – A Brief Guide to Working Safely: INDG258](#) – Health and Safety Executive
- [The Safe Isolation of Plant and Equipment: HSG253](#) – Health and Safety Executive
- [Safety in Gas Welding, Cutting and Similar Processes: INDG297](#) – Health and Safety Executive
- [Hot Work on Small Tanks and Drums: INDG314](#) – Health and Safety Executive

Further risk management information can be obtained from [Aviva Risk Management Solutions](#)

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