



# The Role of the Attendant

Info Sheet 8 a

Have you ever thought about how much training is needed by the person stationed outside the confined space? Traditionally a Confined Space Attendant/Guard/Spotter is used to initiate a response if an emergency is to occur during the job. According to NIOSH Confined Space FACE studies, about 30% of the incidents where an emergency response is initiated, the Attendant dies because their initial reaction is to jump in to help the downed entrant. This reaction is usually the result of the lack of training these people have. There are many perceptions that place the least trained individual at the point of entry including:

- a) Never had a problem and don't see the need;
- b) Having a skilled tradesman watching someone work does not provide "value"; and
- c) Collective agreement issues - seniority, flexibility, etc.

Therefore based on the above, the practices regarding the Attendant need revisiting.

## **Remote vs. At Entry Point**

The first practice to look at is where the Attendant is positioned. A primary task of the Attendant is to initiate an emergency response. However in a lot of situations, it is not necessary for the Attendant to be immediately outside the space in order to do this. The hazard assessment will tell you what types of injuries could occur. The position of the Attendant is dictated by the injuries and nothing else. If the workers inside could sustain a Critical Injury (any injury/illness that would render them incapacitated or immediately disorientated) as defined in the regulation, you need an Attendant at the entry point. For all other types of injuries, the Attendant can be somewhere else with the ability to communicate with them. Any remote Attendant needs to have a formal person check system in place. This system ensures the Attendant and workers inside communicate (and possibly see) each other at set intervals.

## **Number of Attendants Required**

Second is how many are needed. Using the analogy, if you consider an Attendant is like a lifeguard at a swimming pool. A lifeguard (based on Standards set by the Royal Life Saving Society) can look after a certain number of people under specific conditions. Based on these standards, one Attendant could look after up to thirty workers (all of which must be in view). In circumstances where there are more than two people inside, the rescue plan must reflect the need for additional rescuers. Exceptions to the one Attendant to 30 workers rule (based on the SafetyScope Site Supervision Manual) could be:



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- a. When workers are out of sight, one Attendant can look after about eight workers, but they must be within “unenhanced” voice communication distance. Use of a CCTV and duplex communication devices that can send and receive simultaneously can extend the distance the entrants are away from the guard. However the distance away should not complicate rescue (eg. IDLH situations require a three to four minute intervention time - see point #3 below).
- b. If workers are in multiple spaces, looking after up to four entrants in up to two spaces providing all are visible is probably the maximum for one Attendant. Again using CCTV and duplex communication device is required in areas that the Entrants are out of view.
- c. If the hazards can create an immediate life threatening injury (e.g. Respiratory arrest), we limit the number of entrants to two in one space and the Attendant fulfills the Rescuer position. A relief attendant who is to take over if a rescue is needed must be no more than one minute away from the space.

**Attendant Tasks & Training** - Third are the tasks they perform. The CSA’s Z1006 Standard as well as various confined space regulations outlines a number of roles and/or duties that need to be fulfilled when work occurs in a confined space. For instance:

- a. a hazard evaluation prior to entry
- b. the set up and operation of hazard control equipment and/or systems (e.g. Gas detection, ventilation, lighting, communication and donning and doffing of PPE)
- c. completion of documentation such as the Hazard Assessment, Hazard Control procedures, Rescue Plan, Permit, Gas Monitoring and Accountability Logs; and
- d. placement and operation of a retrieval system

Nowhere does it state (Standard or Regulations) that separate people perform these functions. However, in all documents, each key requirement must be conducted by a competent person. When looking at the facts, there is no support for placing those on modified duties, students or “Joe” because he is doing “nothing else at the moment” at the point of entry. You must select the best candidate for the job that can perform both the mental and physical skills that are required. Training must occur. You need not train everyone to do the job. Can everyone weld in your operation, fix equipment or perform the accounting duties? No. Specific people have specific skills in every organization. This job is no different. Training should be intended to be one time only and the upkeep of the skill is from using the skills. Do you have to do your mechanic’s apprenticeship every three years? No, it’s assumed that if you get your papers, you will upgrade as technology changes but you don’t go back every three years to renew. The “license” to be a knowledgeable confined space person should be renewed by on scene critique or auditing of how well the job is run. As you upgrade your program, training will need to happen as well.