Confined Spaces Permit Required – Landscaping Fatality File



Fatal Incident in Permit-Required Confined Space During Landscaping

On October 10, 2023, a fatal incident occurred at a landscaping project in Houston, Texas, involving a 44-year-old worker, Robert Matthews. Matthews was assigned to repair an underground irrigation system, which required entering a confined space—a small utility vault beneath the property. The space was classified as a permit-required confined space due to its limited entry and exit points, potential for hazardous atmospheric conditions, and lack of ventilation.

Despite the classification, the company failed to issue the required permit or conduct a proper assessment of the risks involved. Matthews entered the vault without any monitoring equipment or safety gear and was soon overcome by toxic gases that had accumulated inside. By the time his coworkers realized something was wrong and attempted to rescue him, it was too late—Matthews was pronounced dead at the scene from asphyxiation.

The investigation revealed that the landscaping company did not have a confined space entry program in place, nor did they provide the necessary training to employees regarding the hazards of working in confined spaces. Additionally, there was no emergency rescue plan, which delayed the response and contributed to the fatal outcome.