

**VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC UTILITIES
CUSTOMER INFORMATION SHEET – CONFINED SPACES**

WHAT IS A CONFINED SPACE?

The Federal and State Offices of Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) define a “confined space” as a space large enough for a person to enter and perform assigned work with limited access that is not designed for continuous occupancy. Examples of confined spaces include manholes, tanks, and crawlspaces. A space could be designated as a confined space if access is restricted for something as basic as unsafe steps. The concern is that an employee could get hurt, trapped, or overcome with fumes in a confined space and rescue would be difficult.

WHAT IS THE DEPARTMENT’S CONFINED SPACE PROGRAM?

The Department of Public Utilities has a Confined Space Program that sets up procedures for employees to enter and work in confined spaces. For confined spaces with gases, fumes, or other potential hazards, employees must follow a permitting process, including air testing and monitoring, prior to entry. Some confined spaces do not require a permit. But for all entry into a confined space, there must be at least two trained employees present – one to enter the space and at one to remain outside of the space and call for help if needed.

HOW DOES THIS AFFECT ME AS A CUSTOMER?

The Department of Public Utilities must identify all confined spaces and train employees on proper procedures for entry, monitoring, and rescue. Confined spaces on Utility or City property have been identified and employees have been trained. The Department of Public Utilities has recognized that some employees are exposed to confined spaces in customer’s homes or businesses; such as meter reading or meter repair in crawlspaces or other areas with limited access. The Department is in the process of identifying all customer-based confined spaces. All reported spaces are inspected and a determination is made whether or not they are truly confined spaces. Affected customers are being notified and have several options to remedy the situation.

WHAT OPTIONS DO I HAVE?

- If you can make access to the space unrestricted (by repairing stairways, widening hatches, etc.), the space may no longer be considered a confined space. It will have to be inspected by the Safety Coordinator after repairs are made.
- If you have a meter located in a confined space such as a crawlspace and you cannot make access unrestricted, you need to either move the meter to a more-accessible location or have a remote meter-reading device attached.
 - The cost of moving a meter varies. Contact a local plumber or contractor for a price quote.
 - Remote meter-reading devices cost approximately \$240 (steam) or \$80 (water) plus installation costs. The Department of Public Utilities will supply wire and you can run wire from the device to the meter location after you install the device. The Department will make the final connection to the meter.

WHAT IF I DON’T MOVE MY METER?

If you decide not to move your meter and just install a remote meter-reading device, please be aware that you will be charged any additional costs associated with OSHA-compliance when your meter needs inspection or repair. These costs could include air quality monitoring and sending two or more trained employees to the confined space. Costs will be in accordance with the Utility Fee Schedule.

WHO DO I CALL WITH QUESTIONS?

- If you have questions about confined spaces in general or would like a copy of the Department’s Confined Space Program or OSHA regulations, please call the Safety Department at 748-2114 or go to www.vpuc.com.
- If you have questions on installing remote meter-reading devices, please call the Director of Operations at 748-2102. To order a remote device or wire, please call the Meter Serviceman (Monday through Thursday) at 748-2108. To set up an appointment for final connection from a remote device to a meter, call Customer Service at 748-7545.
- If you have questions on moving meters to alternate locations, please call a local plumber or contractor for guidance and an estimate.
- Once you have completed repairs and would like your space re-inspected, please call the Safety & Training Coordinator at 748-2114 to set up an appointment.