

Grease Trap Hazards

Safe grease trap design, training, and maintenance, as part of an overall workplace safety and health program, can prevent grease trap-related incidents.

Introduction

Many businesses use grease traps (also known as grease interceptors) as part of a waste management system to prevent sewer system blockages from accumulated waste fats, oils, and greases. Workers can be injured if they trip or fall into a grease trap that is not properly covered. In some cases, grease traps may also be permit-required confined spaces and can present life-threatening hazards if entered into without safeguards in place. To prevent such hazards and potential injuries, employers must ensure that grease traps are properly covered, and that covers are adequately secured. **Covers that are designed for residential use should not be used for commercial purposes.**



Photo: OSHA

How Grease Traps Work

Grease traps capture and separate fats, oils, and greases from wastewater before the wastewater flows to the local sewer system. Businesses, such as restaurants, food processing facilities, hotels, grocery stores, and bakeries use grease traps. Many wastewater treatment agencies and public-owned treatment facilities require businesses to install grease traps.

OSHA Walking Working Standards for Grease Trap Hazard Prevention

Employers must protect workers from tripping or stepping into or through any hole that is less than 4 feet above a lower level by using covers or a guardrail system.	29 CFR § 1910.28(b)(3)(ii)
Employers must protect workers from falling through any hole that is 4 feet or more above.	29 CFR § 1910.28(b)(3)(i)
Covers must be capable of supporting at least twice the maximum intended load that may be imposed on the cover at any one time.	29 CFR § 1910.29(e)(1)
Covers must be secured to prevent accidental displacement.	29 CFR § 1910.29(e)(2)
Walking-working surfaces, including covers, are inspected regularly and as necessary, and maintained in a safe condition.	29 CFR § 1910.22(d)(1)

Slip, Trip, and Fall Hazards

Large capacity grease traps are often located in outside areas accessible to and frequented by workers. The grease trap is usually located in the ground, with a large manhole cover that must remain secure to prevent unauthorized access to the trap and prevent additional waste from entering the trap.

Employees working near or around grease traps may be exposed to trip and fall hazards if grease trap covers are not strong enough to support loads placed on them, or are not properly secured. Workers can trip over an unsecured lid, or fall into the large grease and wastewater pit. Workers who fall into a grease trap could suffer serious injuries or may even drown.

Confined Space Hazard Prevention

When grease traps are large enough for bodily entry, they may be considered permit-required confined spaces and if so, must meet certain requirements. For example, employers must inform exposed workers of the hazards of the space, post danger signs, and prevent unauthorized entry into the space (29 CFR § 1910.146).

Grease traps can generate flammable and toxic gases over time. These gases can include methane (natural gas), hydrogen sulfide, carbon monoxide, carbon dioxide, and/or other gases depending on the greases, oils, and fats found in the grease traps. Grease traps must be tested and monitored before entry for oxygen content, flammability, toxicity, or explosive hazards.

Large grease traps are often deep enough to present an engulfment hazard. Employers must determine the potential for employee engulfment associated with grease traps and implement controls and training to protect employees from this hazard. Exiting from the trap can be difficult if a ladder or other form of egress device is not located in the trap.

When workers have to enter grease traps to perform work, employers must adhere to additional requirements. For example, employers must follow the requirements of the Permit-Required Confined Spaces (29 CFR § 1910.146) and the Control of

Hazardous Energy (Lockout/Tagout) standard (29 CFR § 1910.147) standards. Employers must also be sure to provide appropriate personal protective equipment in accordance with 29 CFR § 1910.132.

When traps are deep enough that a worker cannot exit without assistance, a ladder, steps, or another acceptable device should be located in the trap.

Additional Information

OSHA's On-Site Consultation Program offers no-cost and confidential occupational safety and health services to small and medium-sized businesses. On-site consultation services are separate from OSHA enforcement efforts and do not result in penalties or citations. However, employers must agree to correct any serious and imminent danger or hazards identified in a timely manner. To locate the OSHA On-Site Consultation Program nearest you, call 1-800-321-OSHA (6742) or visit www.osha.gov/consultation.

Contact OSHA

Under the OSH Act, employers are responsible for providing safe and healthful workplaces for their employees. OSHA's role is to help ensure these conditions for America's working men and women by setting and enforcing standards, and providing training, education, and assistance. For more information, visit www.osha.gov or call OSHA at 1-800-321-OSHA (6742), TTY 1-877-889-5627.

This bulletin is not a standard or regulation, and it creates no new legal obligations. It contains recommendations as well as descriptions of mandatory safety and health standards. The recommendations are advisory in nature, informational in content, and are intended to assist employers in providing a safe and healthful workplace. The Occupational Safety and Health Act requires employers to comply with safety and health standards and regulations promulgated by OSHA or by a state with an OSHA-approved state plan. In addition, the Act's General Duty Clause, Section 5(a)(1), requires employers to provide their employees with a workplace free from recognized hazards likely to cause death or serious physical harm.



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