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ermits to Work

A permit-to-work (PTW) system is a formal system used to control work that is potentially hazardous. A PTW is a document which specifies the work to be done and the precautions to be taken. PTW's form an essential part of safe systems of work for many facilities activities. They allow work to start only after safe procedures have been defined and they provide a clear record that all foreseeable hazards have been considered.

A PTW system is an essential control method where there is a high risk of serious injury which cannot be controlled by other safeguards. Work that requires a permit might include entry into confined spaces, hot work, work on electrical systems or access to fragile roofs and suspended ceilings.

The PTW is a procedure that authorises certain people to carry out specific work within a specified time frame. It sets out the precautions required to complete the work safely, based on a risk assessment. It describes what work will be done and how it will be done, often in a method statement.

The PTW requires declarations from the people authorising the work and carrying out the work. It may require a declaration from those involved in shift handover procedures and before equipment or machinery is put back into service, it will require a declaration from the originator that it is ready for normal use.

Issuing a PTW does not, by itself, make a job safe. The system does, however, provide a formal procedure to determine what precautions are required, how this should be communicated, recorded and monitored, and how work should be authorised.

The aim of a PTW system is to ensure that the task is carried out in accordance with the carefully considered conditions specified in a permit drawn up and independently verified by competent individuals.

As well as setting out the steps which must be taken before and during a job, permits should state any conditions to be met after the work is completed, i.e. the procedure for handing back the plant or area for normal operational use.

A PTW system forms an essential element in the safety management system. Risk assessments under regulation 3 of the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 will help the operator to identify circumstances where permits to work are needed.

There are lots of guidance notes on Permit-to-Work systems for different industries at www.hse.gov.uk