

LOSS CONTROL BULLETIN

Grain Bin Safety

Grain bins are a very important part of the farming operation. They provide a secure place to store your farm's commodities, not only as a producer but as a consumer. Unfortunately, grain bins can become very dangerous without proper planning, precaution and good judgment.

It is essential that anyone working with or in grain bins is aware of the dangers associated with them and how these risks can be avoided. Grain bin hazards include respiratory problems, fire, explosion from flowing grain, or collapse of bridged or vertical wall of grain.

Grain Hazards

Flowing grain acts like quicksand; it can take less than three seconds for a person to become entrapped in flowing grain. When grain is stored in poor conditions, such as high moisture, it becomes moldy. Moisture in the grain will cause the grain to clump together and form a crust. When grain is moved, hollow areas will form underneath this crust, creating a "bridge." This bridged grain can be very hazardous in the event someone tries to walk on or be supported by the bridge. This same moisture can also cause grain to attach to the sides of the bins, forming vertical columns which can be equally as dangerous. Attempting to remove or dislodge these vertical columns can result in a falling or avalanche hazard if not done carefully.

Grain Safety Tips

- Avoid entering a grain bin unless it is absolutely necessary.
- Make sure all augers and other machines connected with the bin are turned off before working with the grain.
- Always wear a safety harness when you are in a bin. The safety harness should have a safety rope and be tied off securely.
- NEVER enter a grain bin alone. There should be at least two other individuals outside of the bin in case you need assistance or need to be pulled out by your safety harness.
- Be very cautious when working around crusted grain. Use a pole or weighted line to break apart crusted grain from outside or on top of the grain bin.
- Make sure that you stay above the highest part of the wall, and work only above the vertical grain wall.
- Make sure there is a permanent ladder installed on the inside of all grain bins for use in an emergency entry or exit.
- All grain bins should be secured properly to prevent any unauthorized entry. Warning decals should be posted on grain bin entrances.
- External grain bin ladders must be raised above ground far enough that they would not be accessible to children.

One of the best precautions you can take is to practice proper management skills. This will help avoid conditions that lead to bridging and vertical columns.

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Respiratory & Fire Hazards

There can be an enormous amount of grain dust that accumulates in a bin. This dust can affect people in different ways; some people are not bothered at all, while others develop breathing, digestion and/or skin problems. To help prevent health problems and allergic reactions, you should always wear the proper protective gear, including dust filter masks and respirators, when working in dusty areas.

The buildup of grain dust can also pose a fire and explosion risk. The dust can easily be ignited by a heat source like sparks or hot bearings. To help reduce the risk of a fire, it is vitally important to enforce a "No Smoking" rule. It is also important not to weld or grind in a bin that has grain in it. Lastly, keep a proper maintenance schedule to prevent machinery failure from causing the grain to ignite.

Grain bins are a very important part of a farming operation, but they can also be very dangerous. It is essential that you take the time to educate your family and workers of the dangers that surround grain bins. Remember to take precautions and use good judgment when working in or around grain bins to ensure everyone's safety.



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