

WEEKLY NEWS COLUMN
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GRAIN BIN SAFETY WEEK

On February 14, 2020 United States Secretary of Agriculture, Sonny Perdue issued a proclamation naming February 16-22 as Grain Bin Safety Week. The purpose of the week is to highlight safety practices and bring attention to safe work practices in an effort to decrease the number of accidents associated with grain handling and storage. The following states have officially recognized Grain Bin Safety Week: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, West Virginia. This collaborative effort between industry leaders and agricultural professionals helps raise awareness about grain bin dangers, provide safety and education and shows best safety practices in an effort to reduce the number of preventable injuries and deaths associated with grain handling and storage.

The most common way that grain bin related accidents occur happens when grain that's put in a bin is still wet. Wet grain can create clumps that make it difficult to load grain from the bin into trucks when it's hauled to market. When that happens, someone has to enter the bin and break up the chunks. The grain can shift, trapping the person, and sometimes suffocating them. The majority of grain bin accidents happen on farms, not at grain elevators. Large grain-handling companies are required to follow specific safety procedures.

Safety equipment is available to producers. Masks and safety harnesses help to prevent a person from getting buried in grain. Another safety precaution is to always use the buddy system when entering a grain bin.

Grain Bin Safety Week also promotes awareness of life-saving grain extraction methods. First responders use specific equipment and procedures to rescue farmers and other workers who've been trapped in grain bins and storage facilities. Rural fire departments can be nominated to receive a grain rescue tube from Nationwide Insurance.

The 2018 Summary of U.S. Agricultural Confined Space-Related Injuries and Fatalities provides the following facts: In 2018, there were 61 documented cases, an increase of 13% over the 54 cases reported in 2017. Of these cases, there were 30 documented grain entrapment cases, 6 reported falls into or from grain storage structures, 7 asphyxiations due to deficient oxygen levels or toxic environments, and 11 equipment entanglements that occurred while working inside or around agricultural confined spaces, such as those involving in-floor and sweep augers. Other incident types involved forage silos, manure pits, and pump pits. Grain entrapments accounted for 49% of the documented cases, a lower percentage than the historical average. For incident types with more than one case, falls and entrapments had the highest fatality rate reported at 100% and 50% respectively. In other words, 50% of the 30 victims entrapped in grain ended up being a fatality. The total number of fatal cases (27) was lower than the number of non-fatal cases (31). These figures are nearly identical to the 5 year

running average of 31.40 non-fatal cases, and 27.40 fatalities per year. However, 2018 showed a decrease in both non-fatal and fatal cases when compared to the 10-year running averages of 36.90 and 30.20 cases per year respectively.

As one of our nations most dangerous professions, the agriculture industry has high rates of fatalities and serious injuries. Providing proper equipment and training to producers becomes increasingly important as children begin to help on the family farm. Awareness and training helps to avoid serious fatal accidents, reduce income lost to agricultural accidents, reduce incidences of chemical related cancers and teaches proper techniques for using chemicals and pesticides safely.

Farm safety information is available from your local K-State Research and Extension unit. Training for youth involved in agricultural related occupations is held on an annual basis. K-State Research and Extension will be hosting Tractor Safety Training for 14 and 15 year olds next month. For more information on farm safety, contact the Cowley County Extension Office 221-5450, 441-4565.

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