



# NEWS

**JB Pritzker, Governor**

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## **Illinois Department of Labor Stresses the Need For Grain Bin Safety**

*Expected Large Corn and Soybean Harvest Could Lead to More Entrapment Danger*

**SPRINGFIELD** – Despite some wild weather in parts of Illinois this year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is predicting a bin buster harvest of soybeans and corn for many Illinois farmers in 2020.

The grain bins that will receive the big harvest are essential to Illinois' agricultural economy. But those bins also can be deadly. Grain storage is a particularly dangerous area on family farms and in other agricultural settings. Those tall, usually metal or concrete silos that dot the landscape across our state cost several farmers and other workers their lives every year.

“As the busy harvest season continues, it is vital that farmers and other agricultural workers put safety first, especially when working around grain-storage facilities,” said Michael Kleinik, director of the Illinois Department of Labor. “Grain bin incidents are also dangerous for first responders. IDOL reminds fire departments that if they provide grain bin rescue response, they must ensure their members are trained to perform this service safely.”

Last year, nationwide there were 38 grain entrapment cases with 23 of those leading to fatalities, according to Purdue University's Agricultural Safety and Health Program, which has documented these cases since the 1970s. Only three grain entrapment cases were reported in Illinois for 2019. However, safety experts believe that some non-fatal entrapments do not get reported.

So far this year 11 grain entrapment cases have been reported in Illinois with four fatalities, according to Dave Newcomb, Agriculture Program Manager with the Illinois Fire Service Institute in Champaign. Newcomb says a late harvest and wet conditions last year caused problems this spring. Wet grain tends to clump and not flow properly through the unloading systems, which can lead workers to enter the bins to rectify the situation. Corn in bad condition often leads to more grain bin accidents.

Grain bin tragedies can literally happen in seconds. Moving grain acts like quicksand. According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), a worker standing on moving grain will be trapped within just five seconds and completely covered in grain within less than half a minute.

OSHA details the three most common scenarios leading to grain entrapment:

- A worker stands on moving/flowing grain typically caused by an auger running or grain being moved out of the bin by gravity.
- A worker stands on or below a grain bridging situation. Bridging happens when damp grain clumps together, creating an empty space beneath the grain as it is unloaded. A worker above or below this bridge of grain is at risk should the bridge collapse.
- A worker stands next to an accumulated pile of grain on the side of the bin and attempts to dislodge it. It can collapse onto the worker.

While workers should avoid entering grain bins if possible, safety measures can greatly diminish the risk if they must enter. One of the most important measures is to turn off and lock out all powered equipment to the grain bin and tag it to remain off – known as Lock Out/Tag Out.

“If farmers shut off the loading systems before entering and do enforce a lock out tag out system, we’d probably cut the numbers of entrapments in half,” said Newcomb. “If the grain has the ability to move, it will grab you. When I am working with the Illinois Farm Bureau, I preach that we must break the culture of working alone. If you are going out to the bin, take someone with you even if it’s just to call for help.”

OSHA also says any worker entering a grain bin should be provided with a body harness attached to a lifeline and an observer should be stationed outside the bin to track the worker and call for help if something goes wrong. OSHA notes that 60 percent of fatalities in grain entrapments cases are would-be rescuers and about seven in 10 occur on family farms.