

Farm workers face fatal safety risks when working in silos

Despite serious workplace injuries and fatalities declining, safety hazards remain for farm workers in the U.S. Overall, accidents and fatalities have declined on farms but fatal accidents involving grain bins and silos have still not improved.

The annual number of fatal grain bin and silo accidents on farms actually increased during the last decade, emphasizing the dangers farm workers still face. Since 2007, 80 workers have been killed in silo or grain bin accidents in the U.S, according to the Labor Department.

Despite silos and grain bins being commonly worked in on farms, many farm workers are unaware of the serious dangers they pose.

How exactly do silo accidents happen? When silos become full of corn, soybeans or wheat, the food sticks to the side of the building, climbing up the walls. Workers go in and try to scrape it off the sides or help it flow down the silo. If proper safety precautions are not followed and the grain begins to flow out of control, a worker may be pulled down and buried by the grains, suffocating and crushing the worker.

The consistent number of fatal silo accidents has angered farming safety experts because these accidents are preventable by following OSHA guidelines. Almost all of the reported fatal silo accidents were caused by employers not following the safety guidelines set in place by OSHA to keep farm workers safe.

OSHA guidelines state that before any worker enters a silo or

grain bin, all power equipment should be turned off, workers should be wearing a safety harness or have a supporting chair and another person should be observing or monitoring the silo when a worker enters. The air quality should be measured for toxins and combustible gases and most importantly, no worker should enter a silo when grains are built up on the sides or overhead.

These safety precautions should be easily understood and are not expensive measures for employers to follow. However, silo deaths still remain a constant threat to farm workers because some employers don't follow the Labor Department's farming safety guidelines.

Farm workers injured in a silo accident or any other accident at work are able to apply for workers' compensation under Pennsylvania law. It is best to work with a workers' compensation attorney who can help workers understand their rights, the application process and offer them the best opportunity to receive compensation for their workplace injuries.

Source: New York Times, "[Silos Loom as Death Traps on American Farms](#)," John M. Broder, Oct. 28, 2012

Our law firm represents injured workers in Pennsylvania. For information about our law firm, please visit our workers' compensation page.