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## PRESS RELEASE

### For More Information:

ELLEN G. DUYSSEN

Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health

University of Nebraska Medical Center

College of Public Health, Room 3035

984388 Nebraska Medical Center

Omaha, NE 68198-4388

402.552.3394

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

*By UNMC, Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health, Omaha, NE*

#### **PLAYING IN GRAIN: A DEADLY RISK**

***Anytime a child plays in grain, there's potential for tragic results.***

Photo credit: © Can Stock Photo / MnyJhee

Even those who grew up on the farm may not realize how dangerous it is to allow children to play in grain in any setting or for any reason.

Jana Davidson, Program Manager at Progressive Agriculture Foundation ([www.progressiveag.org](http://www.progressiveag.org)), had not fully realized until she began working with the Foundation the hidden and deadly dangers associated with grain storage.

“Several years ago, I participated in a mock grain entrapment rescue a few years ago,” Davidson says. “It was so eye opening. Even though everyone involved knew it was a controlled and safe situation, we all felt the solemn impact of realizing the consequences of grain entrapment. Even the person being rescued was somewhat traumatized afterward by the event.”

Many people don't understand the difficulty of pulling someone out of grain if they become buried. The grain puts so much weight on the person, it's virtually impossible to get them out without appropriate grain rescue equipment such as a rescue tube.

Davidson points out that parents are the first teachers their child will encounter, which makes serving as a role model and placing safety first in every agricultural setting so important.

“Parents should always role model safe behavior,” she says. “Sometimes our children experience ag safety training and come home to serve as our trainers and safety advocates. Even though we've done something hundreds of times without incident, we must understand tragic incidents can happen if we aren't working in a safe manner.”

Anyone working around a grain bin should never enter the bin without someone outside to monitor their activity and be ready to summon help.

“Make sure they keep their eyes on you the entire time you’re in the bin,” Davidson says. “Make sure every safety measure is in place, including a safety harness, lock-out tag-out procedures, and all the safety principles related to entering a grain bin. If children observe these safety practices, they are going to adopt them, too.”

Often, the public believes that victims of injury and accidents on the farm involve youth who are working there. However, 60% of farm-related accidents involve children who were in an agricultural setting but not engaged in any farm work.

“Some children are in the wrong place at the wrong time,” Davidson says. “There are times when a child’s perception of the dangers is skewed because at some time they may have had a fun experience without realizing the inherent danger of activities such as petting a calf, playing in grain, or being close to a farm animal or equipment.”

Children should be taught that petting a calf at a fair or agritourism event in a controlled setting is far different than attempting to pet a calf while it’s in a pasture or pen with the mother cow or other cattle. It’s important for them to recognize the dangers of encountering farm animals outside a controlled situation.

“If you see things involving children in a farm setting or at events such as a festival or ag tourism activity that concern you, it can be addressed without a confrontation,” Davidson says. “Approach the person in charge of the event and explain your concerns. Have some options and alternative suggestions to share. We want to avoid being just negative, but also try to offer one or more solutions to the issue.”

Corn boxes which children can play in like a sandbox are popular at many agritourism and farm festival events. However, inherent dangers associated with this type of activity include choking hazards if a child attempts to swallow corn kernels, allergic or asthmatic reactions to the grain or chemicals used to grow it, kernels of corn stuck in a child’s ear or nose, etc. Animals may be attracted to the grain and leave behind feces. Playing in corn may be seen by the child as appropriate, leading children to enter grain bins and other grain storage units, sometimes with tragic consequences.

An alternative to a corn box is a sand box or a water table, which have become very popular with children.

“Last year, we were participating in a very large event in the Mid-west. It was brought to our attention that they were planning to have large corn boxes for the children to play in,” Davidson says. “When we heard this, we quickly made a phone call to the event’s organizer and explained why this was not ideal and how it could potentially send the wrong message.”

The organizer took the Foundation’s advice and used sand instead and continue using sand to date. Davidson and her colleagues have also witnessed safe play areas for children being added at various farm shows to not only provide a safe space for the children to play, but to educate both parents and attendees on how these can be replicated on the farm to ensure the play area is separate from the busy, working farm.

Repurposed grain bins, sometimes used as play places for children, also pose some serious risks due to the lack of windows and ventilation inside the bin.

“Without adult supervision inside the bin, it may become overheated,” Davidson says. “It’s also possible a child inside the bin could be injured, but without windows no one on the outside would realize it.”

Other unexpected incidents related to farm animals may catch both parents and children off guard.

“Animals are strong and respond to their natural instincts, which can result in injury to people who are near them,” Davidson says. “As a youth I purchased a horse that spent a few days making the trip from Alberta, Canada to Pennsylvania. As he was loaded off the trailer, I was anxious to dote on my new pet. I was hugging and loving on him while he ate grass in the yard and he simply raised his head and broke my nose. I had lost my safety focus, not taking into account his weight and strength, and unfortunately it cost me.”

Children should be aware that the sweet, loving calf they petted one day may not be as happy and docile another time. Educating youth about the basic characteristics of all animals is a key part of farm safety education.

The Progressive Agriculture Foundation provides customized safety training events across America.

“We try to customize the training to meet the needs of the specific community,” Davidson says. “There’s a high probability that children who don’t grow up on the farm will someday visit a farm in some form. It’s especially important to educate parents and children on the dangers of grain engulfment because nearly 62 percent of these incidents are fatal.

“It is always devastating to hear of a fatality in the ag industry, especially if it can be prevented,” she adds. “One thing I have noticed in my time working with the Progressive Agriculture Foundation is when a child dies due to an ag-related incident on the farm, it not only affects the family, but the entire community. Therefore, our vision of ‘no child should become ill, injured or die from farm, ranch and rural activities’ continues to remain at the forefront of all we do.”

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