

In light of recent tragedies involving grain handling, the Nebraska Corn Board would like to remind farmers, farm workers and farm families that grain handling, especially the unloading and cleaning out of grain bins, deserves special attention because it is one of the most dangerous tasks on the farm.

“There is more than 1 billion bushels of on-farm grain storage capacity across Nebraska, and cleaning out those grain bins is something many farmers do during the summer months as they sell grain and prepare for harvest in the fall,” said Alan Tiemann, a farmer from Seward and chairman of the Nebraska Corn Board.

Tiemann said farmers should take extra precautions and use the buddy system to help keep everyone safe during the process.

“Always have at least one other person on site who knows the safety rules, how to shut down augers and how to get help if it’s needed,” he said.

Dangers in a bin being unloaded include flowing grain, which can in a matter of seconds pull a person down into and even under the grain. Grain just around the legs is enough to trap a person and grain around a person’s chest can cause suffocation because of the pressure.

Crusted grain along the sides of a grain bin or forming a “bridge” along the top of the grain is also dangerous.

A person standing on a crust of grain either not knowing or knowing but trying to break it can fall down into the bin and into the grain should the crust collapse. Grain crusted along the side can fall like an avalanche onto a person who is trying to break the crust or clean out the bin.

“People can suffocate with only 12 inches of grain covering them because that’s the equivalent to nearly 50 pounds per cubic foot and you can’t get up,” Tiemann said.

Another area of concern are sweep augers, which help unload the grain from the bin. While these augers can have some safety guards in place, they are generally open at least on one side to gather the grain. It’s critical to stay clear of the auger and know the situation – and have a buddy who knows how to shut down the system keeping watch.

“Farmers, their families and employees should develop a set of safety rules that everyone should know and follow,” Tiemann said. “Safety in and around grain bins should be at the top of that list.”