

Illinois Dept. of Labor joins with farm safety experts to promote the Stand Up 4 Grain Safety Week; "Small Changes. Big Impact."

Small Changes Can Have a Big Impact on Safety

Every year in Illinois and throughout the grain belt states, dozens of people become entrapped in grain, usually inside a grain bin, and many of those people perish. Hundreds more are injured in grain handling or storage accidents. Preventing these tragedies is the goal of Stand Up 4 Grain Safety Week, March 29-April 2.

IDOL's Illinois OSHA division joins with the agricultural industry and safety experts in promoting this year's Stand Up 4 Grain Safety theme: "Small Changes. Big Impact."

"Following just a few safety rules can make a big difference in reducing the hundreds of injuries and deaths that occur each year. 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.

Each day of Stand Up 4 Grain Safety week will focus on a different topic. You can register for the free daily training sessions, which being at 10 a.m. each day, here: Stand Up 4 Grain Safety - Stand Up 4 Grain Safety

- Monday, March 29: Kickoff Event with safety trainings, tips, and safety demonstrations.
- Tuesday, March 30: Near Miss Reporting.
- Wednesday, March 31: Impact of Grain Quality on Safety.
- Thursday, April 1:



Grain Bin Safety.

- Friday, April 2: Emergency Action Plans.

Grain bin tragedies can literally happen in seconds. Moving grain acts like quicksand. According to the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), a worker standing on moving grain can be trapped within just five seconds and completely covered in grain in 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 whenever possible, safety measures can greatly diminish the risk if they must enter, said Dave Newcomb, Agriculture Rescue Program Manager with the University of Illinois Fire Services Institute. 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. Newcomb will be a presenter of the free, on-line Grain Bin Safety seminar on, Thursday, April 1.

Newcomb estimated that consistently following Lock Out/Tag Out rules could cut the number of grain entrapments in half. Far too many entrapments and injuries happen when grain handling equipment is powered on while someone is in the bin. Another vital tip - do not work alone. If nothing else, your co-worker can call for help if something goes wrong, said Newcomb.

OSHA also stresses that 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. While there are close to 8,400 off-farm grain storage facilities, about 70 percent of entrapments happen on family farms.

Grain accidents don't just injure and kill farm workers. OSHA notes that 60 percent of fatalities in grain entrapments accidents are would-be rescuers.

"Grain bin accidents can injure or kill not only the initial victims but also 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," said IDOL Director Kleinik.

Settlement permits release of up to 1,200 vulnerable state prisoners

Those eligible include medically vulnerable, elderly inmates

By Sarah Mansur
Capitol News Illinois

The Illinois Department of Corrections and a number of elderly and medically vulnerable prisoners seeking early release from state

prisons due to COVID-19 reached a settlement Tuesday in a lawsuit brought by the inmates against the department.

Under the settlement, IDOC agreed to "identify

and evaluate medically vulnerable prisoners for release through legally available mechanisms." The settlement also calls for the department to apply good behavior credits to inmates who are

eligible for those credits and have at least nine months left on their sentence.

Inmates with at least nine months of their sentence remaining who are considered low-risk will receive 60 days of good behavior credit, while those considered medium-risk will be awarded 30 days credit.

The application of credits is expected to begin within the next 30 days, the court document states.

Amanda Antholt, one of the attorneys representing the prisoners, said the settlement will likely impact up to 1,200 inmates across Illinois prisons.

"What we've accomplished is really working with the state to make sure that they're doing everything they can to utilize the avenues available to them, where it's safe and appropriate to do so, to be releasing folks or to transferring them over to home detention, particularly those who are getting out soon anyway," Antholt, who works for Equip for Equality, said in a phone interview Tuesday.

Department of Corrections officials have the option of offering eligible prisoners medical furloughs, electronic home detention and early release.

Medical furloughs, which Gov. JB Pritzker expanded under an executive order last year, are defined as a "temporary leave of absence from secure custody for limited medical purposes for offenders who, because

of a medical condition, are determined to be either of limited physical mobility or terminally ill."

The settlement arises out of the lawsuit filed last April on behalf of medically vulnerable and elderly prisoners, by a group of public interest lawyers, including attorneys from Equip for Equality, Loevy & Loevy law firm, the Uptown People's Law Center, and the Illinois Prison Project.

The federal lawsuit asked the court to issue an emergency order that would have authorized the release of roughly 13,000 state prisoners. The lawsuit argued that keeping medically vulnerable prisoners who are at risk of contracting COVID-19 confined in close proximity to one another violated their constitutional rights, including the right protecting individuals from cruel and unusual punishment.

Last April, a federal judge denied their emergency request, finding the state was not violating prisoners' constitutional rights.

"[The prisoners] have provided no convincing reason for a federal court to intrude here and now — either to issue a blanket order for the release of thousands of inmates or to superimpose a court-mandated and court-superintended process on the mechanisms currently in place to determine which IDOC inmates can and should be safely removed from prison facilities at this

time," the judge wrote in his 48-page opinion.

Releasing inmates "requires a process that gives close attention to detail, for the safety of each inmate, his or her family, and the community at large demands a sensible and individualized release plan — especially during a pandemic," the opinion continued.

Antholt said the settlement also ensures IDOC is providing training to all the relevant facilities' staff about how to accommodate the needs of vulnerable prisoners.

"Obviously this is training that we wish would have been done a year ago, but at least they're doing it now," she said.

The latest IDOC data shows 82 prison staff and 45 prisoners are currently positive for COVID-19, and a total of 4,177 staff and 10,768 prisoners have tested positive since the pandemic began.

There have been 87 Illinois prisoner deaths due to COVID, according to the Marshall Project's database.

A spokesperson for the Illinois Department of Corrections did not respond to a request for comment about the settlement.

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