

Preventing falls from grain bins

Byline: Canadian Agricultural Safety Association

Word Count: 449

It doesn't take a long fall to cause a serious injury. Serious injuries can occur from a fall from any height. Falls from grain bins happen far too frequently and these falls, at worst, can be fatal. According to the Canadian Agricultural Injury Data, between 2003 and 2012 across Canada, there were 13 fatalities from falls from a ladder or scaffolding and another four fatalities from falls from a silo or grain bin. Not all falls lead to death. However, non-fatal falls from heights most often result in lost-time injuries and this can prove costly on the farm. Either way, preventing falls can save lives and money.

Most grain bins have built-in, vertical ladders on the exterior in order to access the top hatch. Many bins also have ladders or stairs on the interior. A fall from any of these ladders can be fatal or lead to life-altering injuries, so it is important to inspect ladders before use and wear appropriate fall protection equipment. It's essential to not use ladders if they are defective.

When climbing a ladder, remember for the following:

- Clean debris from footwear before starting to climb.
- Clear debris from ladder rungs as you climb.
- Any bent, cracked, or damaged rungs or rails should be removed from service, tagged out, and repaired or replaced before further use.
- Avoid climbing ladders in poor weather conditions (rain, snow, high winds).
- Always maintain three points of contact when climbing (two hands and one foot OR two feet and one hand).
- Never carry anything in your hands up a ladder. Use a rope to hoist items up or wear a tool bag, belt, or backpack.

Something to keep in mind is that fall protection systems are required when there is a risk of falling more than a pre-determined height (usually ten feet or three metres) or onto/into a hazardous surface or liquid. Check your provincial health and safety legislation for various fall protection requirements.

For a bin, a fall protection system consists of a properly fitted and adjusted harness, shock absorbing lanyard, lifeline, and rope grab attached to a secure anchor point OR properly fitted and adjusted harness, retractable lifeline, attached to a secure anchor point. **Note:** There are fall protection systems made specifically for grain bins.

It's a good idea to have a fall rescue plan in place. A person falling while wearing a fall protection system will be suspended in mid-air and most likely will not be able to self-rescue. This fall rescue plan should be part of the farm's overall Emergency Response Plan.

Fall protection equipment can save lives. It takes a minimal investment of time and money and can help to ensure safe and productive work.

About the BeGrainSafe Program

The BeGrainSafe Program is an initiative of the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association and is supported by sponsors and donors including the Canadian Agricultural Partnership, a federal, provincial and territorial initiative, G3, FMC, Corteva AgriScience, CN, Canadian Canola Growers Association, Alberta Wheat Commission, Manitoba Canola Growers Association, Saskatchewan Canola Development Commission, Alberta Canola Producers Commission, Viterra, Saskatchewan Wheat Development Commission, Farm Credit Canada and GSI. For more information about BeGrainSafe, visit casa-acsa.ca/begrainsafe.