

Grain Engulfment Rescue Training



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CLEAR LAKE, IA--“It felt real tight across the chest and then your legs and knees, you can't really move that easy,” said James Eskilvsen.

Eskilvsen was trapped in what could be a nightmare scenario for some....stuck in grain and unable to hoist himself back out.“About the best thing I could do was wiggle my toes and I wasn't going very far doing that,” he said.

Luckily for him, this was just a practice scenario---and rescuers were readily on hand. But every year, some face a more serious fate. “We've had several fatalities this year already and it can, the numbers change from year to year depending on how wet the grain is that's put up the year before,” said Bill Harp, of the Safety and Technical Rescue Association.

And Harp says this has been a really wet year for grain. “So we're seeing a lot of bridging and out of condition grain in bins that farmers are starting to pull and move out of their bins and we're seeing more and more engulfments,” said Harp.

For rescuers, Harp says safety and efficiency are key. “If it's in the wintertime there's hypothermia that could set in so we really want to make sure that we're not having five and six hour rescues,” he said.

GSI offered grain engulfment rescue training for free Wednesday. They were hoping lots of people from area fire departments would show up.

Harp travels around the country teaching grain bin safety to rescuers.

Here's how they got Eskilvsen out: they turned off all machinery and equipment and assembled a rescue tube around him. Then they used a Shop Vac to suck some of the grain away from his body. Eventually enough was removed for him to free himself. “Keep pulling up with your arms on the inside ladders there and moving your feet slowly just start to walk up get a little tired,” said Eskilvsen.

We spoke with the Mason City Fire Department by phone.

We're told they haven't had to respond to a grain engulfment situation in years.

However, they do train for the scenario in case they're called to assist some of the area's rural communities.

