



National
Grain and Feed
Association

National Grain and Feed Association
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OSHA Considers Policy on Sweep Augers Inside Grain Bins

On Aug. 11, representatives from the NGFA and Grain Elevator and Processing Society (GEAPS) met with Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) officials to discuss the methods and procedures used for the operation of sweep augers inside grain bins.

The meeting was based upon OSHA's request to learn more about the process of removing grain from a bin as it developed a response to a letter from an insurance company representative not associated with the NGFA asking the agency to explain its "policies and procedures" for operating a sweep auger.

In January 2009, OSHA posted on its Internet site a letter of interpretation drafted in response to questions posed by the insurance representative, who had asked if a sweep auger could be operated without the sump being protected by some type of machine guarding, like grating.

Other than a provision in the OSHA grain handling safety standard (1910.272) that addresses whether an employee may enter a bin when machines are operating, OSHA does not have a formal policy addressing the operation of sweep augers. However, a best practices document referenced by the insurance company representative stated that an employee should work within six feet of the auger inside the bin. The insurance company representative failed to note in his correspondence with OSHA that the best practices document had been developed in 1996 by a state grain and feed association in concert with an OSHA regional office. In response to the insurance representative's letter, OSHA stated it would not consider maintaining a distance of six feet from partially guarded or unguarded energized equipment within a storage bin to be "other equally effective means or methods" as set forth in the grain handling standard [1910.272(g)(1)(ii)].

The NGFA, which became aware of the issue when the OSHA response letter was posted on the agency's website, subsequently contacted OSHA to obtain clarification. At that time, OSHA told the NGFA that it had received a second, follow-up letter from the insurance representative asking the agency: 1) if a sweep auger can be operated in a bin with an employee present; and 2) if not, what method or procedure OSHA would find acceptable for removing grain from flat-bottom grain bins.

OSHA agreed to meet with the NGFA and GEAPS to discuss how sweep augers operate, how they are used within the grain-handling industry and how the initial best practices document was developed prior to issuing a response to the insurance representative's second letter. Representatives of three OSHA entities were involved in the meeting -- the Directorate of Standards and Guidance, the Directorate of Enforcement Programs and the Solicitor's Office. During the meeting, several means of addressing employee safety while

operating a sweep auger were discussed, including: 1) job safety analysis; 2) lockout/tagout of equipment; 3) confined space entry permits; 4) machine guarding; and 5) providing space between auger and employee, while the auger is in use. The NGFA and GEAPS also emphasized that in the preamble of the grain handling standard, OSHA based the final language for Section 1910.272(g)(1)(ii) on comments that more flexibility is needed to protect employees from equipment when working inside bins, silos or tanks.

OSHA stated that the information provided by the NGFA and GEAPS had been very useful, and would be considered as the agency determines how to respond to the insurance representative's second letter. The NGFA will continue to monitor this issue, and will keep members abreast of developments.