

## **Fire Safety Institute Trainer Talks Grain Bin Safety**

Dave Newcomb still remembers the bruises that covered his grandpa after the farmer survived a power take-off incident several years ago.

Since his youth, Newcomb has worked hard to raise awareness of farm safety issues. He has been with the Illinois Fire Service Institute (IFSI) for 18 years, and was a full-time firefighter for 35 years. Last year, he was named IFSI coordinator for Agriculture and Ethanol Programs and trains agricultural accident first responders.

Newcomb strongly supports the National Farm Safety and Health Week (Sept. 18-24) theme: “Safety Counts-Your Community Depends on It.” Illinois farming accidents happen in small-town America where everyone knows each other. For Newcomb, the entire rural community needs to be knowledgeable about agricultural accidents, how to prevent them and what happens when they do occur.

According to Newcomb, the best way to get communities to understand how serious grain bin accidents are, they have to see it.

“People are visual learners. You can talk numbers until you’re blue in the face. If they see what can happen in five, ten seconds, it makes it real,” says Newcomb.

Supplying rescue units with the proper training and equipment remains a huge challenge. Costs can exceed \$2,000 per training session.

Newcomb says progress is being made thanks to sponsorships from fire departments, county Farm Bureaus and COUNTRY Financial for agriculture safety training. Last year, COUNTRY provided \$13,000 to 40 county Farm Bureaus to help train firefighters and emergency medical technicians.

“Many rural and volunteer emergency responders have very tight budgets and cannot afford grain extraction equipment,” said Eric Vanasdale, senior loss control representative at COUNTRY. “The more equipped and prepared they are, the better protected you, your family and your employees are,” says Vanasdale.

Equipment and training is only effective if rescuers can get to the scene. Newcomb adds that most departments rely on volunteers. When a call comes in, they have to report to the station before even leaving for the accident scene, and sometimes travel time takes up to 20 minutes.

“A typical rescue takes about four to six hours with 40 to 50 rescuers for a grain bin incident whether it’s a rescue or a recovery,” says Newcomb.

Newcomb advises rural first responders to contact one of the 60 Illinois Mutual Aid Box Alarm System rescue teams to the scene. You can go to [www.mabas.org](http://www.mabas.org) to find your division's dispatch number. These teams have the right equipment and trained rescuers. "Call them immediately and get them on the way," says Newcomb.

After a grain bin incident that claimed two lives last year, spreading knowledge about grain bin safety has become vital in Illinois. The Grain Handling Safety Coalition, a collection of public and private organizations including the Illinois Farm Bureau, was created to encourage rural communities to support safety training. The coalition is made up of several Illinois organizations to provide training, education spots and public safety announcements to communities. Among its members is Dave Newcomb.

"There is a need to overcome complacency. Farmers do things every day they don't think twice about doing," says Newcomb. "Farm deaths hit home in rural communities. It can affect the person you sit next to at a basketball game."

Vanasdale states that farmers should never enter a bin while loading or unloading. "If there is no alternative and you must enter a bin, do so under the following conditions:"

- if the grain is less than waist deep and all electrical equipment has been locked out.
- if adequate ventilation has been established. At minimum, wear a particulate dust mask.
- if a co-worker is present, outside of the bin and has available means of contacting emergency responders.