

## **Farm Safety Tip – Taking Precautions against Silage “Avalanches”**

If you search the internet on silage safety, you will find several articles about the dangers of silage gases.

Here are three such articles: <http://safety.blr.com/display.cfm/id/94000> and <http://www.cdc.gov/nasd/docs/d000701-d000800/d000741/d000741.html> and <http://www.age.psu.edu/extension/factsheets/e/E16%20.pdf> .

While silage gasses are an important safety topic, we also need to be mindful of another silage hazard that often goes under the radar screen – silage “avalanches”. Avalanches have resulted in deaths as well as serious injuries including permanent spinal cord damage.

Overfilled bunkers, trench silos, and drive-over silage piles are often overlooked as a potential hazard. As one victim who nearly lost his life said “I have been in (silage) pits hundreds of times, and you just become complacent because nothing ever happens. It just takes that one time.”

Here are some tips to be safe around silage:

#1 DO NOT OVERFILL! Do not pile forage any higher than what your unloading equipment can reach safely.

#2 Use care when removing tires, plastic covers, and spoiled feed from the top edge of the face. Stay at least three feet from the edge, and approach carefully with minimal disturbance. A hooked pole or rod can be used to stay even farther back while pulling tires or plastic back from an edge that looks particularly unstable.

#3 Avoid undercutting silage during removal, and keep the face as smooth as possible. Undercutting can form a cantilevered edge.

#4 Do not use lifting methods on the face during removal, as this can cause fissures which destabilize the face.

#5 If more silage is added to an existing pile or bunker, always remove the plastic cover before adding it. Never put more silage on top of the plastic, as this silage can easily slide down the plastic and become an avalanche during silage removal.

#6 Stay away from the silage face during removal or sampling, and do not allow people near the face, especially while someone else is on top removing plastic or tires.

#7 When sampling, take the sample(s) from the loader bucket after moving it a sufficient distance from the silage face.

#8 Do not park or exit vehicles near the face.

#9 Use a machine with a ROPS cab, or at a minimum a ROPS with side screens, for silage removal. This will provide some protection for the operator if an avalanche occurs.

For more detailed information, see <http://farmsafety.ucdavis.edu/Docs/Silage-Safety.pdf> and <http://www.ansci.umn.edu/dairy/dinews/10-1safety.htm>

