

September 30, 2016

PROTECT YOUR LUNGS AT HARVEST TIME

Working around grain means working around dust and chaff. Dusts have the potential to cause health problems or even permanent lung injury. Farmers account for more than 30 percent of adults disabled by respiratory illness. Yet, a large percentage of farmers are nonsmokers. If smoking is not to blame for these ailments, then what is? The answer is "Farmer's Lung."

Farmer's Lung is initially an allergy caused by dust from moldy grain, hay, or straw. Everyone involved in farming and grain handling needs to be concerned about this disease. In early stages, it can seem like nothing worse than a nagging winter cold. If ignored, the allergic reaction can cause permanent lung damage. Breathing dust from stored grain or old hay means breathing in fecal material from rodents and birds, as well as molds, fungus, and bacteria in the enclosed environment. So grab that grain dust mask and use it.

Use a vented, two strap facial mask. These are the ones with a button in the middle. Make sure it is NIOSH approved and two straps. When fitting the mask, make sure it remains sealed when turning, scooping, talking, etc. and be aware that a beard or facial hair will compromise a proper seal.

Use a quality, disposable dust mask or a respirator with replaceable cartridge to filter dusts and help provide clean air. Change the mask or cartridge frequently.

Filter masks may provide adequate protection from common agricultural molds, dusts, and chaffs; however, they will not protect the wearer from agricultural gases. An example would be a filled silo, manure pit or grain bin after fumigation. This situation would require a self-contained breathing apparatus similar to those worn by firefighters so there is always oxygen available.

Many people do not know how to properly fit a two-strap mask with a button in the front to allow you to exhale and not break the seal. 1) Cup the mask in one hand and place it over your nose and mouth. 2) Pull the top strap over your head and above your ears. 3) Pull the second strap around the head so it fits snugly on your neck. 4) With the mask in place, put fingers of both hands on the nose of mask to push down out of the eyes. Do not pinch the nose piece as this creates a pocket for dust to enter. 5) Adjust and pull the straps back. 6) To determine if mask is snug place both hands over mask and blow out. If you can feel air coming out from the sides of the mask, readjust until you can't feel air blowing out. 7) To remove, take off one strap at a time and use until mask is soiled, then replace it.

With Farmers Lung, mold spores attach themselves to airborne dust particles when farmers move or work with hay, grain, or silage materials in which mold spores have grown. As a result, farmers inhale both dust particles and mold spores. In fact, a farmer can inhale up to 750,000 of these spores per minute.

The body has natural defense mechanisms (such as coughing and sneezing) that help prevent dust and other particles from entering the lungs. However, mold spores can often bypass these defenses because of their small size and overwhelming numbers. Mold spores move into, accumulate, and settle into the lower lungs. The bottom line is protect your lungs and wear a mask around dusty conditions.



For more information on choosing the right mask, getting a good fit, and properly caring for it, view these short videos from the US Agricultural Safety and Health Centers.

<http://bit.ly/2dsnFEp>

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