

OSHA ISSUES NEW SWEEP AUGER INTERPRETATION POLICY MEMO

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Over the past several years there has been uncertainty within the grain handling industry on what type of sweep-auger equipment can be used and the types of procedures the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) may find acceptable.

In 2009, OSHA issued a letter of interpretation that essentially created a new policy for operating sweep augers inside grain bins. In the letter, OSHA stated an employee cannot work inside a bin with an energized sweep auger, unless the auger was “completely guarded.” The Agency did not offer any acceptable alternative procedures for removing grain from a bin if a partially guarded auger cannot be used, nor did OSHA define what is meant by completely guarded or unguarded. Prior to the letter, it was common practice in the industry to “guard”, or cover the top and back of the auger while in operation. Following the letter, OSHA stated that the entire auger, including the front, needed to be covered. However, a sweep-auger cannot properly function if it is completely guarded.

As a result, OSHA issued numerous citations to grain-handling facilities for allowing employees to work around “unguarded” sweep augers. This caused confusion within the industry since many were unsure of what type of sweep-auger equipment could be used and the types of procedures OSHA may find acceptable.

Not long ago, an Illinois grain company legally challenged OSHA citations they had received based on the 2009 letter of interpretation. Following a settlement agreement in early 2013, OSHA released a sweep auger policy memo in May of 2013. In total, there are 10 criteria outlined in the memo regarding employee entry into bins with mobilized sweep augers. The entire document is based mostly upon the existing requirements under 29 CFR 1910.272 or OSHA’s Grain Handling Standard as well as both engineering and administrative controls.

This presentation will review these 10 criteria in detail and provide examples of engineering controls that can be utilized to comply with OSHA’s new sweep auger interpretation policy memo. The PowerPoint presentation is available for viewing on the WABA website at www.wiagribusiness.org. The May 3rd 2013 policy memo can be viewed on OSHA’s website at www.osha.gov.

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