

Silage Piles can Cause Fatalities and Serious Injuries

More than 162 million tons of corn silage is produced, stored on farms, and used as feed every year in the U.S. The packing process results in high-density material that can weigh between 550 and 1,650 pounds per cubic meter.

Because of its size, piled silage can be a hazard. Silage material that comes loose from the pile can trigger an avalanche and crush a person underneath it, severely injuring or killing him or her. Silage the size of a washing machine can easily weigh more than 2,000 pounds, more than any person can expect to escape.

Never take a silage pile for granted. Take a minute to plan and obtain proper equipment.

- Time is essential if you are covered by a collapsed pile. Never work in, on, or around a pile alone so a partner or other workers can call for help in the event of an accident.
- Keep a safe distance from the face of the pile and don't stand closer to the face than three times the silage pile height.
- Stay at least 3 feet away from the edge of the pile while climbing to remove plastic and tires.
- Don't fill a pile or bunker taller than the equipment can reach. This can cause the face to be undercut and more susceptible to collapse.
- Don't dig into the bottom of the silage and create an overhang.
- Don't drive equipment parallel to and near the pile face.
- Don't let the pile get too steep. Pack the forage at a maximum slope of 3:1.
- Maintain proper distances around equipment as operators may not see you.
- Wear safety vests for better visibility and follow a safe traffic pattern for equipment.
- Be careful around equipment such as facing heads to prevent entanglement. Turn off equipment and wait until it stops if you need to inspect it.
- Never ride in the front-end loader bucket.
- Use equipment to handle tires to avoid being too close to the pile face.
- Remember that footing can be less reliable in inclement weather like snow and rain.
- Always use OSHA-approved fall protection when working on piles 6 feet in height or greater, including establishing proper anchorage points, proper harness and lanyard use, and training.
- Be aware of silage gases. Carbon dioxide is colorless but can be very dangerous due to the risk of asphyxia as it displaces oxygen and gives a person little notice they are about to be overcome. Nitrogen dioxide is highly toxic and reaches peak levels about three days after harvesting. It can look like a fog or smoke, be orange, yellow, or red in color, and may have a strong bleach-like odor.