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Note: Abbreviation for Northeast Iowa Community College is NICC.

NECAS RECEIVES GRAIN ENGULFMENT SIMULATOR TO TEACH GRAIN SAFETY AND RESCUE STRATEGIES

PEOSTA—American farmers labor every day in one of the world's most dangerous occupations. The National Education Center for Agricultural Safety (NECAS), formed on NICC's Peosta campus in 1997, views education on campus and on the road as the key to preventing serious or fatal injuries on the farm. A generous donation of a grain engulfment simulator and 50 foot grain leg will teach area farmers, firefighters, paramedics and agriculture professionals how to avoid or respond to a dangerous farm accident. A partnership between Grain Systems Incorporated (GSI), Nationwide Agribusiness, GROWMARK, the Dubuque Racing Association and NECAS made the donation possible.

Jeff Decker, GSI product safety and litigation manager, visited campus on Aug. 11 to install the grain engulfment simulator and a bucket elevator. Decker taught nearly 20 agriculture professionals the basics of grain engulfment scenarios, how to avoid their occurrence and rescue techniques to extricate a victim submerged in a grain bin.

"Today we trained on prevention and how to protect themselves and others from grain engulfment on the farm. Each year there are numerous deaths associated with grain engulfments," Decker said. Decker, a resident of Central Illinois, has 18 years of experience in the product safety field at GSI.

Decker explained that engulfment occurs for three primary reasons. Flowing grain in a grain bin is the first cause, where the rapidly flowing crop quickly engulfs a victim: in 15 seconds submersion is waist deep and in 30 seconds the grain rises above the victim's head. In these situations, victims cannot extricate themselves alone. The second cause involves crusted grain, which is grain that is out of condition or spoiled because of weather conditions. Crusted grain often forms when the product is stored over the winter, freezes and then thaws. The crusted grain creates a fall hazard because its condition creates pockets or forms large chunks of grain beneath the surface. The surface of grain in the bin appears safe, yet is not. Farmers also risk engulfment in a third type of circumstance, where grain that is out of condition adheres to the bin's walls and, as the farmer removes the grain by hand, the spoiled grain buries the victim in an avalanche.

Dan Neenan, NECAS manager, knows that the grain simulator should prove its effectiveness as he applies it toward engulfment prevention on campus and on the road to other locations. "The grain simulator is small enough that we can load it on a 20-foot trailer and deliver our education to firefighters in other towns, without these personnel needing to drive to Peosta," Neenan said. "The simulator allows others to prepare for what they might run into on a call. For many fire and rescue personnel, grain engulfment is a first time experience for them."

Personnel who arrive at a grain engulfment scene use coffer dams, or rescue tubes, to protect the victim and prevent further submersion. After inserting the interlocking tubes, rescuers remove the grain surrounding the victim. Once rescuers remove the grain, either using buckets or a portable vacuum, the victim can climb out of the tube independently or responders can extricate the person from the bin. The Aug. 11 training day featured classroom time to study grain engulfment in depth and concluded with participants taking turns in the role of victim or rescuer.

The National Education Center for Agricultural Safety's objectives are to raise awareness regarding the high incidence of farm injuries and fatalities, to increase knowledge of the serious nature of agricultural injuries and their causes, and to teach communities about the difficulty of conducting on-farm rescues. For more information, call NECAS at (563) 556-5110, ext. 371.

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PHOTO CAPTION 1: A partnership brought a grain engulfment simulator to NECAS to train others on prevention and rescue strategies.

PHOTO CAPTION 2: A volunteer participant played the role of victim in a grain engulfment accident.