



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Machine Guarding—Another Terrorist Threat?

“Machine guarding”—sounds like it might have something to do with terrorism prevention, doesn’t it? While I would like this kind of alert upgraded, it’s not about agroterrorism. I want to see fewer farmers injured or killed because of missing guards and other safety devices on their machinery.

In the last fifteen years, equipment manufacturers have done a wonderful job making shields and covers that are easy to remove and replace. Almost everything is now hinged and has a snap catch. It makes access simple, and replacement is, well, a snap. Unfortunately, not everyone owns this newer equipment, so some of the equipment has been modified.

As I visit farms, I see a lot of grain bin unloading systems with the belt or chain drive unguarded. I know the shields were taken off to make repairs, but that was years ago! Dig them out of the weeds today, and if they need repair or replacement, do it now before you start harvest. Remember that it only takes a misstep to get caught in the mechanism.

Another place to check is the auger intake area. Many auger companies offer shields at such a low cost that you can’t afford not to replace them. If you want to build one yourself, look at the engineering of the new shields and construct yours so it’s strong enough to withstand the rigors of a busy harvest. Keep in mind that the shield needs to keep your fingers from contacting the turning auger.

Your combine and other harvest equipment also need to be properly shielded. The power takeoff and other drive mechanisms are the biggest problem areas, but check the pulleys and sprockets. They should be covered as well. Ideally, you’re never off the machinery while it’s running, but we both know that at some point, you will be. All it takes is being in a hurry and stepping a little too close.

The future holds great potential for shielding and guarding. For example, researchers are developing presence sensors that will shut down equipment when someone gets too close. Until we all have this type of automation, though—and probably even after we do—you’ll need to make safety inspections a part of gearing up for harvest. So take the time you need to bring your farm up to the safety standards that you, your family and co-workers deserve.