



# IAFF SAFETY ADVISORY

## SILO FIRES

JUNE 2026

Following recent incidents, the IAFF is issuing a safety alert to inform members of the risks associated with responses to fires at material silos and related storage structures. These low-frequency, high-risk events require a cautious and informed response to prevent serious injury or loss of life.

### FIREFIGHTING & OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

When responding to a silo fire, it is imperative to stop and gather as much information as possible before taking action.

During size-up, fire fighters should seek any available information from the storage structure manufacturer, as well as the owner or operator on site.

Silo fires are typically slow-burning fires contained within a fire-resistant structure. In many cases, they will consume the available oxygen or fuel and self-extinguish without fire department intervention. Improper actions, however, can quickly turn a dangerous situation into a deadly one.

Members should exercise extreme caution when operating around a burning silo, and department policies and procedures should reflect established industry best practices.

### RESOURCES

- [OSHA Alert Bulletin](#)
- [NGFA Firefighting Manual: A Guide for Operators of Grain Handling Facilities and Fire Department Officials](#)
- [Silo Initial Assessment Worksheet](#) (RescueTechs LLC)
- [Conventional Silo Fire Decision Tree](#) (Penn State University)

### RECENT EVENT

#### SEARSMONT, MAINE

On May 15, 2026, a volunteer fire fighter was killed in the line of duty, and multiple others were injured following an explosion during firefighting operations at a lumber processing facility in Searsmont, Maine. A security camera caught the initial blaze of the incident and is viewable [here](#).

Fire fighters had been responding and operating at a silo fire when the incident occurred, triggering a large-scale emergency response and a multi-agency investigation.



Photo Courtesy of Maine State Fire Marshal's Office



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### **PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION DETERMINATION (As of June 2, 2026)**

The Office of the Maine State Fire Marshal and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms (ATF) and Explosives National Response Team began demobilization operations on May 25, 2026, following completion of the initial scene examination.

While the on-scene phase of the investigation concluded, the investigation itself remains active and ongoing. Crane operations were completed to lift and move the silo structure, allowing investigators access to areas critical to the scene examination and the evidence recovery effort.

Based on the information obtained to date, the cause of the fire is considered accidental. Investigators believe the fire originated in the area of the unloader mechanism at the base of the silo.

Before fire suppression operations could fully contain the smoldering fire, a rapid ignition of suspended particulate material resulted in an explosion within the silo. Investigators determined during the explosion that the silo lifted from its concrete base, releasing large amounts of sawdust and additional particulate material. The silo then toppled over, at which point the surrounding area became rapidly engulfed in fire. The fire rapidly spread to adjacent buildings and structures within the mill complex, contributing to the extensive damage to multiple buildings.

In the coming months, investigators will return to the facility to conduct a more detailed examination of the unloader systems, which may include additional testing in coordination with insurance representatives and additional technical experts to further identify a cause.

Investigators also determined the facility's fire suppression system, which was located near the top of the silo, did not activate because temperatures at that elevation did not reach the activation threshold after the fire originated at the base of the silo.

The investigation is expected to remain open while follow-up analysis, testing, reports, and coordination continue. Freedom of Access Act (FOAA) requests related to the investigation will be directed to the ATF. The Office of State Fire Marshal will be coordinating with the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) regarding fire fighter safety and has initiated the line-of-duty death review processes.

### **RECENTLY ISSUED FATAL INVESTIGATION REPORT**

#### **CAMBRIA, WISCONSIN**

Earlier this year (2026), the U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board (CSB) released a new safety video on its investigation into the fatal combustible dust explosions and fires at the Didion Milling facility in Cambria, Wisconsin, on May 31, 2017.

Five employees were killed in the incident, and 14 others were injured. The incident also destroyed the facility, resulting in over \$15 million in property damage. Didion Corn Milling Company officials were sentenced to federal prison for their role in the deadly explosion.



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“**Deadly Dust: Explosions at Didion Milling**” – this [15-minute video](#) includes an animation of the events leading up to the incident and commentary from CSB Board members.

### RELATED COVERAGE

- [U.S. Chemical Safety Board: CSB Releases Safety Video on Combustible Dust Explosions](#)
- [U.S. Chemical Safety Board: Didion Milling Company Explosion and Fire](#)
- [U.S. Department of Justice Archives: Corn Milling Company Officials Sentenced to Federal Prison for Their Role in Deadly Explosion that Killed Five Workers](#)
- [TMJ4 News: Wisconsin corn plant explosion at Didion Milling](#)

### RELATED INCIDENTS

#### FIRE FIGHTER KILLED IN SILO FIRE (IOWA, 2019)

- [CDC Stacks: “Industrial Silo Fire and Subsequent Explosion Kills One Firefighter and Critically Injures Another – Iowa”](#)
- [NIOSH Line of Duty Death Report: “Industrial Silo Fire and Subsequent Explosion Kills One Firefighter and Critically Injures Another - Iowa](#)

#### FIRE FIGHTER KILLED IN SILO FIRE (NEW YORK, 2011)

- [FireRescue1: “NY silo fire LODD prompts safety, tactics report”](#)
- [National Technical Reports Library: “Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation \(FACE\) Report: Volunteer Assistant Fire Chief Dies at a Silo Fire/Explosion in New York.”](#)

#### GRAIN ELEVATOR EXPLOSION (LOUISIANA, 2022)

- [KPLC7: Grain Elevator Explosion](#)

#### GRAIN ELEVATOR EXPLOSION (TEXAS, 2025)

- [ABC7 Chicago: Video shows moment grain elevator explodes in Texas](#)

#### THE DeBRUCE GRAIN DISASTER (KANSAS, 1998)

- [The DeBruce Grain Disaster 1998 | A Plainly Difficult Documentary](#)
- [OSHA: DeBruce Grain Elevator Explosion - Report](#)
- [Dust Safety Science: What Caused the DeBruce Grain Elevator Dust Explosion: The OSHA Report](#)