



Tractor Talks

Respiratory Illnesses

Tips for Talking

- **Plan ahead.** Be familiar and comfortable with the topic.
- **Make it relevant.** Include related tasks and work areas or events.
- **Involve your workers.** Ask questions that lead to participation. See suggestions under "Discussion Drivers."

What went wrong?

December—March

Manuel hadn't felt well recently and the chest tightness and shortness of breath had him worried about having a heart attack! After a couple of days, he started coughing and the fever and chills convinced him it was the flu. All the while, he continued to work at the farm he had worked at for the last 6 years. He loved working with the cows and spent most of his time in the barn. Unfortunately, Manuel continued to feel bad and the cough was getting worse, so he decided to go the urgent care center where he was given a prescription for the cough and told to take acetaminophen for the fever and aches. Nothing helped. **What went wrong?**

Respiratory Illnesses*

Fresh air and a healthy lifestyle are often associated with farming. However, farm work can expose you to respiratory hazards known to cause serious illnesses. Here are some facts about common respiratory illnesses among farmworkers:

- **Farmer's Lung.** *Inhaling mold spores from baled hay, stored grain, or silage can lead to an allergic reaction that includes shortness of breath, chest tightness, coughing, and flu-like symptoms.*
- **Organic Dust Toxicity Syndrome (ODTS).** *Also called Silo Unloaders Syndrome or Grain Fever, ODTS is caused by inhaling organic dust. Areas with high dust levels include silos, grain storage, hog and poultry barns. Symptoms usually appear 4-6 hours after exposure and include cough, fever, chills, fatigue, and muscle pain.*
- **Silo Filler's Disease.** *Fermenting silage gives off a pungent gas (nitrogen dioxide) that, when inhaled, can cause lung damage even though there may not be any symptoms. Exposure higher levels (20ppm or more) can cause coughing, coughing up blood, shortness of breath, and chest pain.*

* If you experience ANY symptoms possibly related to a respiratory exposure, tell your supervisor and your doctor. Let your doctor know that you work on a farm. Repeated or prolonged exposures can lead to serious illness and death.

Reduce Your Risk of Respiratory Illness

- Avoid grain silo entry during the first 3 days after filling.
- Store grain at recommended moisture content levels.
- Ventilate silos for 15 to 20 minutes before entry.
- When cleaning a barn or stable, lightly water the areas to reduce airborne dust.
- For best protection, a respirator may need to be worn. Make sure you choose the right respirator and understand how to use it correctly.

Discussion Drivers

1. What work-related details did Manuel need to share with the doctor?
2. How would knowing about Manuel's farm work have helped the doctor provide better treatment for his symptoms?
3. What specific jobs or tasks put you at risk for respiratory illness?

For more information on Respiratory Protection for Farmworkers visit: <http://nasdonline.org/1169/d001011/farm-respiratory-protection.html>

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