



NEWS

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IDOA URGES PRECAUTIONS TO PREVENT ANHYDROUS AMMONIA ACCIDENTS

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. – The Illinois Department of Agriculture is advising farmers to make sure they review safety and handling procedures before applying anhydrous ammonia fertilizer to their fields this spring.

Accidental releases of anhydrous ammonia increased to 50 last year. That figure is twice the annual average for the previous five years, according to the department, which is responsible for investigating such incidents.

“If greater attention had been paid to the proper operation of equipment, many of these accidents may have been prevented,” Jim Larkin, bureau chief of Ag Products Inspection, said. “Our investigations show the leading cause of accidents in 2010 was the improper management of ammonia hoses.”

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To prevent a reoccurrence of last year, the department is advising ammonia applicators to follow these recommendations:

- Inspect anhydrous ammonia hoses prior to each use. Look for cracks, cuts, rubs and soft spots, as well as “slippage” near the couplers. Always purge anhydrous ammonia from the hose or system prior to inspection.
- Perform regularly-scheduled maintenance on the tool-bar quick-coupler (refer to the manufacturer’s recommendations) to assure it is suitable for service. A visual inspection should be performed prior to each use. Check to assure hoses are the correct length for the type of nurse tank being utilized.
- When applying anhydrous ammonia, always use the safety chains provided on the nurse tank along with the attached hitch pin and safety clip to prevent hoses from stretching and breaking.
- Prior to pulling a nurse tank on a roadway, purge all anhydrous ammonia from the tool-bar and hoses and secure the end valves of the hoses to the parking plugs on the tool-bar. Attach the safety chains, hitch pin and safety clip. Drive at speeds of 25 m.p.h. or less.

In the event of an accident, the applicator who was in control of the ammonia at the time of its release must immediately report the incident to regulatory agencies, within 15 minutes if possible. Farmers are not exempt from these reporting requirements.

“We have definitely seen an increase in enforcement of the reporting regulations, from both USEPA and IEPA,” Jean Payne, President of the Illinois Fertilizer and Chemical Association (IFCA), said. “There is no penalty for reporting an ammonia release on time, only for not reporting a release on time, so please don’t be afraid to make the phone call.”

A handy wallet card that lists the phone numbers of the agencies that must be notified when a release occurs is available by calling the Illinois Fertilizer and Chemical Association at (309) 827-2774.

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The department and IFCA have jointly produced an ammonia safety training video designed specifically for farmers. It highlights the most common safety errors that can lead to an anhydrous ammonia accident. The high-resolution video can be viewed online at www.ifca.com or www.agr.state.il.us or by contacting IFCA to obtain a DVD copy.

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