

Conversations about Safety: Protecting Young Farm Workers

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Alex is a 13-year-old who lives on a farm in Spencer, Iowa. Alex works on the family farm and is about to bale hay alone for the first time. The field Alex needs to bale will take about 5 hours to complete. Alex grew up watching family members bale hay and has been trained on how to operate the baler by Dad. When leaving the house this morning, Alex was reminded to be careful and not to rush, but to finish the job by that afternoon.

The baler is old and noisy, and Alex does not have hearing protection. The tractor doesn't have a cab or umbrella. It's a hot and windy day, and there are dark clouds forming - the weather forecast is calling for heavy rain in a few hours.

After working for about 3 hours, Alex notices that the hay is beginning to bunch up in the intake chamber. It is hot out and Alex is in a bad mood, feeling hot, dirty, tired, and has a headache. Alex also feels pressure to finish the job before the rain. To unclog the baler, Alex needs to get off the tractor to do something about the hay buildup. Alex remembers being told to shut off the tractor to clear a plug but also remembers Dad and neighbors clearing the plug with the tractor still running. In fact, one time when the baler was shut off to clear a plug, there was trouble getting it restarted.

What should Alex do?

This is a vignette that was developed and used by Anna Proctor, incorporated into her dissertation "Conversations about Safety: Protecting Young Farm Workers," to foster conversation between farming parent and youth. This work was supported by the GPCAH Pilot Grant Program, <https://gpcah.public-health.uiowa.edu/gpcah-pilot-grant-program/>