



INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMME ON THE ELIMINATION OF CHILD LABOUR
SAFETY AND HEALTH FACT SHEET
HAZARDOUS CHILD LABOUR IN AGRICULTURE
GRAINS AND OILSEED



BACKGROUND

Major grain crops like wheat, rye, barley, oats, maize, rice, sorghum, and millet account for the largest part of global crop production. They are an important source of carbohydrates, calories, and protein for both humans and animals, and of industrial commodities like starch and alcohols. Oilseed production, especially soybean, sunflower and rapeseed, is also important. The seeds are crushed and processed into vegetable oils and the residues are then used to produce high-protein meals and animal feeds.

Grain and oilseed production involves preparing the soil and seedbed by ploughing or tilling, sowing the seeds, fertilization, irrigation, weeding and crop thinning, harvesting, drying and storage for transportation. Harvesting is performed using tools ranging from scythes to mechanized harvesters and can include the use of chemicals to dry crops ready for harvesting.

Some cultivation techniques and work processes in grain and oilseed production have changed little since farming began. For example, in rice production, women do the majority of the work in the rice paddies, and often bring their children with them. Children generally begin to help their mothers once they are physically able to work in the paddies. Commercial agriculture has, however, profoundly changed many techniques and processes, introducing new work hazards such as mechanized machinery and chemical pesticides.

MAJOR OCCUPATIONAL HAZARDS

- Injuries from contact with, or entanglement in, unguarded machinery or being hit by motorized vehicles
- Injuries from cutting tools ranging from minor cuts to severe wounds
- Falls and slips - from operators' platforms, grain storage structures, ladders and so on
- Loss or impairment of hearing from noisy machinery
- Respiratory problems during harvest, storage and transportation from inhaling grain and oilseed dusts, and from fungal/bacterial spores present on the plants
- Poisoning and long-term health problems from pesticide use or exposure to pesticide-treated seed, contamination in the field or from pesticide-treated crops in store
- Respiratory or skin problems from fertilizer application
- Suffocation from engulfment either in flowing grain or grain surfaces which collapse when walked on, or lack of oxygen in enclosed silos
- Fire and explosion risk from grain or oilseed dusts when crops are stored
- Musculoskeletal injuries from repetitive and forceful movements, and lifting and carrying heavy or awkward loads
- Electrocution hazards from overhead power lines, extension cables, etc.
- Long working hours
- Stress

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

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