All Points Cooperative employee freed from soybeans after four hours in grain bin.

After a four-hour rescue on March 13, a former All Points Cooperative employee walked away from a bin where he was trapped in soybeans.

The man, Rick Frickenstein, was taken to Gothenburg Memorial Hospital for observation but didn't appear to have injuries, according to Gothenburg Fire Department assistant rescue captain Mike Wagner.

Frickenstein apparently was near the bottom of the silver bin farthest west on the All Points site and was trying to unplug an auger when he became engulfed in grain.

Gothenburg fire fighters arrived about 9:30 a.m.

Crew members used climbing gear to get to the man who was immobilized up to his armpits, rescue officials said.

They shoved plywood around Frickenstein to remove pressure from the grain, strapped webbing around his chest with a rope and began vacuuming out the grain.

Frickenstein was freed about 1:30 p.m.

Once rescuers arrived on the scene, training officer Kent Kline said they found Frickenstein

standing on top of a trap door to a conveyor that takes grain from the bin about 20 feet from the ground of the 100-foot bin.

Two rescuers, in harnesses and attached to ropes, climbed down to the trapped man and began putting “cribbing,” or plywood and plastic inserts, around Frickenstein to stabilize the grain around him.

Second assistant fire chief Troy Franzen described the entrapment as like being in quicksand.

“The harder you struggle, the grain fills in the void,” Franzen said.

Rescuers pulled enough grain away from Frickenstein to attach webbing with a rope around his chest, Wagner said.

One challenge was operating at the bottom of a funnel of moving grain, Kline said.

And keeping Frickenstein warm.

“A big complaint was that he was cold,” Wagner said.

Because air in the bin was the temperature of the grain (around 22 degrees) and the work was arduous, the rescuers—Rick Crown, Jon Hudson, Shane Butterfield and Justin Carlson—rotated shifts with two at a time with the patient.

Rescuers also rigged a pulley system above the bin to manually pull out Frickenstein.

But because they couldn't get enough grain away to hoist him out, rescuers made a decision to open a side door at the bottom of the bin and start vacuuming out grain.

"We had to first establish that it was okay to open the door," Kline said, noting that rescuers dropped a rope from the top of the bin outside to measure the inside level of grain.

Unfastening the door, with the pressure of soybeans inside the bin was still a gamble, Kline and Wagner said.

When enough of the bin was emptied, rescuers on a catwalk above the bin and below pulled on ropes attached to a pulley to free Frickenstein.

"There wasn't much room on the catwalk to work," Kline said. "It was only about 18 inches wide."

Frickenstein walked out a door at the bottom of the bin and was whisked to Gothenburg Memorial Hospital in a waiting ambulance.

Wagner noted that the department had the equipment for a grain entrapment rescue and was not quite finished equipping a special trailer with it.

During the rescue, he said it took several trips up and down the All Points elevator in a concrete silo to get needed equipment to the top.

Two years ago, members of the Gothenburg Fire Department conducted a training exercise dealing with grain entrapment inside an All Points bin.

“One of our goals in training is to minimize those risks to all involved,” Kline said.

Nonetheless, he said they learn something new each time.

Kline added that risk is involved in the simplest of calls and is something fire fighters and rescue crew members constantly think about.

“No matter what personal differences may exist on the outside, I know when it comes to a call that the guy I am with has my back and I have his,” he said. “That’s the way we work.”

Similar rescue situations in the past include getting Lane Tederman out of a boot pit and Jarwin Vak and Loren Wagner, Mike’s father, out of bins where their feet were caught in augers.

In the late 1970s, Gothenburg youth Becky Thorman suffocated in a grain bin on a farm.

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