SAFETY GUIDE

Coal Silo Safety Design Guide

Comprehensive guide to coal silo safety: NFPA 68 venting calculations, inerting system design, monitoring requirements, and ATEX compliance.

Doc. No.	Version	Issued	Category	Website
MX-SG-001	Rev 1.0	October 2026	Safety Guides	www.manxingstorage.com

1. Hazard Overview

Stored coal presents two principal hazards: combustible coal dust explosions and spontaneous heating. Modern safety design combines explosion protection (venting or suppression), inerting where required, continuous monitoring and strict operational controls. This guide summarizes the design approach applied to Manxing coal silos.

- Dust explosion: coal dust suspended in air ignites; flame and pressure propagate through the silo
- Spontaneous heating: oxidation of coal generates heat; CO and methane are early indicators
- Secondary explosions caused by dust layers disturbed by a primary event
- Ignition sources: hot work, mechanical sparks, static electricity, smoldering lumps

2. Explosion Venting per NFPA 68

For dust explosion venting of a cubic (box-shaped) enclosure, the vent area is determined from the cubic law as:

$$A_v = C \times K_{st} \times V^{(2/3)} \times P_{max}^{(-0.5)}$$

Symbol	Meaning	Typical Coal Dust Value
A_v	Required vent area (m2)	Calculated per enclosure
K_st	Deflagration index (bar x m/s)	80-180 (bituminous); 40-90 (anthracite)
V	Enclosure volume (m3)	Silo volume
P_max	Max explosion overpressure (bar)	7-10
C	Vent panel constant (bar x m/s)	Per NFPA 68 tables for selected panel
P_stat	Vent panel activation pressure (bar)	0.05-0.1
P_red	Reduced pressure after venting (bar)	Below enclosure strength

Illustrative example: a 50 m3 coal dust enclosure with Kst = 150 bar x m/s, Pmax = 8 bar gives V^(2/3) = 13.6 and Pmax^(-0.5) = 0.354, hence A_v = C x 721. With a typical panel constant C = 0.005 the required vent area is approx. 3.6 m2. Final vent sizing, panel selection and P_red verification are always performed by the Manxing engineering team per the latest NFPA 68 / EN 14491 edition.

3. Inerting System Design

- Inert gas (nitrogen or CO2) injected into the silo headspace to limit oxygen
- Target oxygen concentration below 5-8% for bituminous coal dust, verified by site testing
- Blanketing during filling and discharge; make-up gas to compensate thermal breathing
- Oxygen monitoring with automatic inerting start/stop and alarm
- Gas-tight silo detailing: sealed hatches, double valves, gasketed roof
- Nitrogen supply from PSA generator or liquid nitrogen storage per site
- Interlocks: filling stopped automatically if oxygen limit is exceeded

4. Monitoring Requirements

Parameter	Sensor	Location / Action
Temperature	PT100 / thermocouple, 3-6 points	Top, middle and bottom zones; alarm at threshold

Parameter	Sensor	Location / Action
CO concentration	Electrochemical or IR sensor	Headspace; early warning of spontaneous heating
Oxygen	ZrO2 or electrochemical sensor	Inerting control; below 5-8% for bituminous
Methane (CH4)	Catalytic / IR sensor	Headspace for high-rank coals
Level	Radar or guided-wave radar	Overfill protection and inventory
Pressure / vacuum	Membrane switches	Relief valve position and filter status
Silicon rubber temperature cable	Distributed sensing cable	Full-height fire detection (optional)

5. ATEX and Explosion Protection Compliance

- Hazardous area classification: Zone 22 inside the silo; Zone 2 outside during filling and discharge
- Electrical equipment: category 3D / EPL Db, temperature class T-groups verified for coal dust
- Equipotential bonding and grounding of all metal parts; resistance below 10 ohm
- Explosion isolation valves between silo and downstream equipment
- Vent panels with flame-less options where a safe discharge zone is not available
- Documentation: ATEX assessment, operation and maintenance manuals, ignition source register
- Compliance framework: ATEX 2014/34/EU, NFPA 68/69/652/654, EN 14491, EN 15089, GB 15577

6. Operational Safety Controls

- Hot work permit system; no hot work on or near the silo without gas testing
- Housekeeping: no combustible dust layers (target below 1 mm; NFPA 652 guidance)
- Filling procedures: controlled fill rate, level interlock, no free-fall above 5 m
- Smoldering detection: temperature/CO alarm triggers inerting and, if needed, controlled flooding
- Fire water ring or spray system around the silo (project dependent)
- Confined-space entry procedure for internal inspection
- Annual safety inspection of relief devices, interlocks and gas detection systems

Contact Manxing

For quotations, engineering review and site assessment, please contact the Manxing engineering team. Our engineers will respond within one business day.

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