

Safety

SOLUTIONS



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An Important Safety Message to All PLANET Members

The statistics are staggering: The federal Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that 170 to 175 workers in our industry (landscape, professional lawn care, and tree care) die on the job each year. Those statistics could be even higher, since not every death, particularly at very small companies, may be reported.

Yet the statistics tell only part of the story. There is also the *human* side of each one of these fatalities — how this person's sudden, unanticipated death affected his or her spouse, children, or other family members. In many cases, these deaths are occurring to young workers, 19 to 21 years old, and to Hispanic/Latino workers who came to the United States from Mexico or other countries in the hope of a better life.

Particularly discouraging is the fact that many of these same types of fatalities reoccur year after year. One example is overturning a zero-turn mower into a pond or other body of water — then getting trapped beneath 800 to 1,600 pounds of equipment.

In South Florida, as many as eight of these fatalities have occurred in a single year. “Many of these incidents have common contributing factors,” notes Sam Steel, senior research associate in agricultural safety and health at Pennsylvania State University.

“Typically, the mower is being operated on a fairly steep slope that may be slippery from rain or heavy dew. When the mower begins to slide downhill, the operator holds tightly to the steering and speed control levers more for protection and balance than for proper inputs to bring the equipment under control. The end result is often an overturn into a body of water,” he says.

To avoid such a tragedy in your company ask yourself these questions:

1. Is our company training our workers in both a language and manner they understand?
 2. Do we conduct weekly tailgate safety training sessions, even during the busiest peak season?
 3. Are we making use of *all* available resources to improve our safety program?
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Conducting Safety Audits

Do you regularly inspect your own property and buildings, job sites, equipment, and operating procedures for potential hazards? If not, now is a good time to begin. Regular safety audits that include corrective actions will prevent future injuries and accidents.

Ask your insurance representative for safety audit checklists you can use. Document all findings, even if hazards appear minor.

Safety audits do not need to take a lot of time. Decide who is responsible for them, and hold those persons accountable. Also, hold someone accountable for follow-up corrective actions. Here are some basic safety audit tips from the University of Saskatchewan's Institute of Agricultural Rural and Environmental Health:

- 1. Inspect job sites, property, equipment, and operating techniques to identify hazards.** Use safety audit checklists to assist you. Enlist an outside person (such as your insurer) to help you recognize hazards.
- 2. Classify hazards and assess risk.** Prioritize the hazards you identify as "high," "moderate," or "low." High hazards are those that are likely to result in death or permanent disability. Moderate hazards may result in temporary disability. Low hazards could result in a minor (first aid) injury.
- 3. Consider how often people are exposed to the hazards you identify.** This will assist you in

ranking each hazard. For example, if your workers are exposed to a hazard on a daily basis, that should give it higher priority than an "occasional" or "rare" hazard.

- 4. Prioritize hazards.** "High" hazards require immediate action because the danger is too great to ignore. "Moderate" hazards require prompt attention because the risk is serious. "Low" hazards require attention, but not as promptly as the others. Write down each corrective action's completion date.
- 5. Prepare a simple worksheet.** Next to each identified hazard, write down its priority for action to remedy it (high, moderate, or low). Then write down what specific action is required, the estimated cost, and the target completion date.
- 6. Continue to monitor safety.** Make safety audits a regular part of your management practices. Assess the effectiveness of corrective actions. **Remember:** There are no shortcuts to safety.

Safety Hotline Reminder

PLANET's free, confidential Safety Hotline is available to all PLANET members with safety or OSHA-related questions. For assistance on topics ranging from where to find Spanish-language training materials to what to do immediately following a surprise OSHA visit, contact Safety Specialist Barb Mulhern at (608) 848-3758 or barbmulhern@landcarenetwork.org.

Safety and Health Program Management Checklist

Editor's note: The following is part of a comprehensive checklist used by State OSHA Consultation Program on-site auditors in Ohio, as Yardmaster, Inc., in Painesville, Ohio, learned. The first part of this checklist on hazard identification and control appeared in the November 2006 issue of Safety SOLUTIONS. Yardmaster President Kurt Kluznik, CCLP, recommends that companies in our industry use this checklist to evaluate their own safety programs.

- Employees receive appropriate safety and health training.** Ensure that all employees understand the hazards to which they may be exposed, how to recognize those hazards, and how to prevent harm to themselves and others by exposure to these hazards.
- New employee orientation includes applicable safety and health information.** This information covers the company's overall safety and health policy, general safety and health rules, major hazards and protections, and emergency procedures.
- Supervisors receive appropriate safety and health training, including how to identify unrecognized potential hazards and maintain physical protection in their work areas.**
- Supervisors receive training that covers the supervisory aspects of their safety and health responsibilities.**
- Relevant safety and health issues are integrated into management training so all managers understand the value of safety.**
- Top management's policies establish a clear priority for safety and health.**
- Top management provides competent safety and health staff assistance to supervisors.**
- Managers personally follow safety and health rules.**
- Managers delegate the authority necessary for personnel to effectively carry out assigned safety and health responsibilities.**
- Managers allocate the resources needed to support the company's safety and health program.**
- Managers support fair and effective policies that promote safety and health performance.** Examples include a written disciplinary policy, personnel evaluation forms, and position descriptions.
- Top management is involved in the planning and evaluation of safety and health performance.** Top management provides visible leadership and ensures that all workers are provided equally high quality safety and health protections so all understand that management's commitment is serious.
- Top management values employee involvement and participation in safety and health issues.**
- An effective process is in place to involve employees in safety and health issues.** Common methods for soliciting employee input include postings, paycheck flyers, and/or meetings.

Motor Vehicle Crash Kills ValleyCrest Workers

For the second time in two years, ValleyCrest Cos., a PLANET member with a very proactive safety program, has lost several workers in a motor vehicle crash. In both incidents, authorities say that the drivers of the other vehicles were at fault.

The latest incident occurred early the morning of December 7, 2006, near Oakdale, California, as five of the company's nursery workers were headed to their jobs. A pickup truck suddenly veered into the wrong lane and collided with the car in which the workers were traveling. Both vehicles burst into flames. The driver of the pickup was suspected of being under the influence of alcohol and other drugs, according to *The Modesto Bee*.

ValleyCrest lost four of its landscape workers in a similar incident in the fall of 2004.

Note: Our PLANET-OSHA Alliance has identified reducing the risk of motor vehicle crashes as one of its four major focuses. For an English or Spanish Safety Tips Sheet (tailgate lesson) on driving defensively, visit:

www.LandcareNetwork.org, then click on "Programs," then on "Safety Programs."

Reminder: Your company's 2006 OSHA Form 300-A Annual Summary of Work-Related Injuries and Illnesses must be posted through April 30, 2007, in a location that can be readily seen by employees.

Checklist for a Drug/Alcohol Free Workplace

- Develop a written "zero tolerance" drug/alcohol policy. Clearly communicate this policy to all employees in a language and manner they understand.
- Encourage employees to report instances of suspected drug/alcohol use. Ensure that your company has a confidential reporting system in place.
- Become familiar with the laws that may affect your program. If you plan to do drug testing, it is especially important to find out whether your state places any restrictions on such testing.
- Check with your workers' compensation carrier and/or state to find out whether your state offers financial incentives to employers who have drug/alcohol free workplaces.
- Decide under which circumstances you want to test for alcohol and/or other drugs.
- Review your written policy and program with legal counsel.

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