# Cemetery Worker Safety Meeting Kit

Cemetery workers operate year-round in all types of weather. Their job duties include grounds keeping, excavating, equipment moving and setup, landscaping, and chemical management. Cemetery workers must use good work practices and get training on job hazards such as field safety, ergonomics, and excavation.

## HAZARDS/DANGERS

Workers in the cemetery industry can face any number of injuries including falls, injuries related to operating machinery or carrying headstones, and hazards related to trenching and excavation. Essentially, digging at a grave site is an excavation like those performed in the construction industry. In addition to the hazards workers face by the potentiality of a wall collapse without proper trench support, they can also be exposed to hazardous chemicals. Workers should have their own personal protective gear such as hard hats to prevent head injury from falling rocks or dirt. In addition, workers should wear respiratory protection to limit the inhalation of elements such as carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, and methane that can appear in the soil.

Marble, concrete, and other memorial stones dot the cemetery landscape. Due to the size and weight of these stones, take care when working around them; overturned stones can cause fatalities. Existing stones should be inspected periodically to ensure that they are firmly and securely set. When moving or installing memorial stones, use mechanical lifting devices; ensure that the load and rigging are secure before attempting to move the stone.

## OTHER CEMETERY HAZARDS FOR WORKERS

- Falls
- Hazardous atmospheres (for example, carbon monoxide, carbon

dioxide, natural gas, methane from decomposing bodies, and oxygen deficient atmospheres)
- Equipment hazards
- Falling loads
- Being struck by or run over by equipment
- Being lowered into a grave by a bucket

# CEMETERY WORK

Cemetery work is divided in two aspects; groundskeeping and digging graves.

- A cemetery groundskeeper focuses on the upkeep and maintenance of the cemetery. Duties include cutting the lawn, pruning trees, keeping vegetation trim and even, and planting grass over new grave sites.
- A cemetery worker digs graves and is also responsible for the general maintenance of the cemetery grounds.

# SUMMARY OF WORK

- Measuring and marking out the grave space.
- Digging the grave either with a mechanical digger or a hand spade.
- Using hydraulic equipment and water pumps.
- Propping up the inside walls of the grave with wood.
- After the funeral service, filling in the grave.
- Regularly checking the headstones in the cemetery for damage and removing any which are unsafe.
- Cleaning and maintaining machinery.
- Looking after the grass and plants around the cemetery.
- Using equipment such as mowers and trimmers.

# GRAVESITE SECURITY AND SAFETY

**Grave Digging:** Grave digging at a cemetery can be done by hand or with excavating equipment. Before you dig, do not assume the area is clear of hazards, ensure that there are no underground hazards

such as pipes or utilities. Always get training on the use and maintenance of excavating equipment before using it and always inspect the equipment before use. If you use manual digging tools, ensure they are the proper size and weight for you to use them properly. Use a functional and proper tool for the job; using the wrong tool can lead to injury.

**Trenching and Excavation:** Trenching and excavation safety protocol, must be followed when digging graves. Grave sides deeper than 5 feet should be shored with supports such as timber or metal struts and hydraulic jacks to avoid a collapse. Sloping is another safety measure for trenches. As with all equipment, you must inspect the shoring equipment before each use. Often timber or metal struts and jacks can deteriorate over time and should not be used. After the grave is excavated, ensure you clearly mark the area to prevent falls.

**Mechanical Lifting Devices:** Overturned stones can cause fatalities due to their weight. Use mechanical lifting devices when moving stones and always ensure that the load and rigging are secure before moving the stone. Whether in motion or not, always set and properly secure memorial stones to protect yourself and others.

**Avoid Slips, Trips and Falls:** Avoid slips, trips and falls by moving cautiously through the landscape and being aware of uneven ground. Avoid walking over grave sites and concrete slabs; older graves may cave in while slabs may be covered with slippery moss or lichen. Practice safe cemetery operations and stay on top of your work.

# FINAL WORD

Cemetery work is not seasonal work. Workers accomplish tasks in all types of weather. Their job includes grounds maintenance, excavating, equipment moving and set up, and chemical management.