

Landscaping Poses a Bucket Full of Hazards

Safety Talk

Whether you call it landscaping, groundskeeping, or yard work, creating and maintaining outdoor spaces can be very rewarding. However, those rewards are not without their risks. Landscapers face a variety of hazards, both physical and biological. In this Safety Talk, we'll discuss some potential hazards of landscaping work and general precautions workers should take while on the job.

What Can Go Wrong

Landscape work ranges from mowing lawns and weeding your neighbor's garden to joining a crew that maintains the vast grounds of a local university. While the scale differs, you'll still face similar challenges and hazards. Potential physical hazards of landscape work include:

- Sprains and strains from handling landscaping tools and materials.
- Electrical hazards from working near overhead power lines.
- Noise from power equipment such as lawnmowers, chainsaws and wood chippers.
- Heat stress from working outdoors for long periods of time.
- Potential falls from trees or aerial lifts.
- The possibility of being struck by passing vehicles.

There are plenty of biological hazards to watch out for, too, including venomous wildlife, poisonous plants and diseases spread by mosquitoes or ticks, including West Nile Virus and Lyme disease.

Snakes, spiders, scorpions, and stinging insects such as bees are found throughout North America. Anaphylactic shock can be life-threatening for people who are allergic to a bee sting, for

example. Skin contact with poisonous plants, including poison ivy, poison oak and poison sumac, can cause rashes or allergic reactions. These plants are particularly dangerous when they are burned and workers inhale smoke from them.

While there are many hazards associated with landscaping, there are several precautions you can take to stay safe.

How to Protect Yourself

All landscapers need to understand the hazards inherent in that line of work and know how to handle their equipment properly. They should:

Be visible to traffic. Believe it or not, being hit by a vehicle is one of the leading causes of deaths for landscapers. Wear a reflective vest so you can be seen.

- **Be prepared for sudden changes in weather**, which can occur quickly during the spring and summer months. Prepare for severe weather and job hazards and know where to seek shelter during thunderstorms.
- **Stay sharp**. Keep blades and chains on equipment sharp. Dull blades or chains require greater force to work, leading to greater likelihood of kickback injuries, and also ergonomic injuries from needing to apply considerable force to a tool. Tool maintenance is vital to your safety.
- **Be safe**. Wear the correct personal protective equipment (PPE), such as gloves, safety shoes, hardhats, and eye and ear protection. Also wear long sleeved shirts and pants and use insect repellent when working on overgrown areas. Also, don't forget to slap on the sunscreen to prevent dangerous sunburns and ensure you are drinking lots of water and taking periodic rest breaks to avoid heat stress