Landscaping Safety Toolbox Talk

WHAT’S AT STAKE?

Landscaping is a dangerous profession. Heat, power tools, sharp implements, and repetitive work can all lead to painful and sometimes debilitating workplace injuries.

An energetic entrepreneur who enjoys the outdoors might find landscaping business ownership an attractive option. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that more time-crunched or elderly homeowners, plus corporate and educational facilities, will soon require landscaping services. To serve this increasing client base, the BLS estimates the need for grounds maintenance workers will increase.

WHAT’S THE DANGER?

LANDSCAPING HAZARDS

Accidents are common in an industry that uses heavy machinery, sharp blades, ladders and boom trucks. But there are more hazards to list: heat stress, overexertion, hearing loss, hand-arm vibration syndrome and chemical exposures.

Heat Stress

The United States National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration identified heat as the No. 1 weather-related killer countrywide, claiming more lives each year than floods, lightning, tornadoes and hurricanes combined. Although you can’t control the temperature, you can control how much exposure workers have to hazardous heat conditions.

Overexertion Injuries

With constant lifting, digging, twisting, turning and carrying, landscape workers are prone to overexertion injuries.

Hazardous Noise Exposure

A Colorado professor recently found 95 percent of urban tree service workers worked in conditions that exceed the OSHA or the NIOSH limits for on-the-job noise exposure.

Vibration Injuries

Many tools used in landscaping present vibration hazards. Repeated exposure to vibration over time can cause damage to muscular, nervous and vascular systems.

Hazardous Chemicals

Lawn care chemicals such as fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides can be safe when handled and applied correctly. However, improper handling and application present risks to landscape workers and to those who live and work near the chemical-exposed property. Immediate injuries from caustic or acidic chemicals include irritation and burns as well as damage to internal organs. Over time, unsafe exposures may create long-term illnesses.

MORE HAZARDS

Though landscapers don’t usually face some of the more deadly construction hazards (falls from heights, silica or working in trenches, for example), they are still exposed to hazards that can cause serious injuries and lasting health problems.

Motor Vehicles and Equipment

Motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of fatal accidents among landscapers. This includes traffic accidents (frequent travel from job to job means more time on the road) and struck-by incidents.

Pesticides and Other Health Hazards

Landscapers face several health hazards on a daily basis. Noise exposure, which is also common in construction, can be addressed through the use of hearing protection. But other hazards are more unique to the landscaping industry, such as exposure to

pesticides.

As the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS) note that, pesticides can enter the body by mouth, through the skin and eyes or as vapors inhaled into the lungs.

Pesticides can cause a wide variety of health effects depending on the product, individual and level of exposure. Chronic, low-level exposure or a single acute exposure can cause workers to have allergic reactions and develop sensitivity to pesticides or occupational asthma.

Working outdoors and performing landscaping tasks can expose you to a lot of health and safety hazards. The job introduces you to a variety of sharp equipment, power tools, dangerous machines, and hand tools, that can cause debilitating injuries if not handled properly.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

SAFETY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Stay visible and dress for safety**: Motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of fatal accidents among landscapers. While at work, landscapers should always wear high-visibility colors. In addition, long pants, sturdy shoes, gloves, and ear and eye protection are a must for any landscaper. Dress for the weather and avoid any loose clothing or jewelry that could get caught in equipment.
2. **Keep tools sharp:** A dull blade is far more dangerous than a sharp one because the user has to exert a lot more force to get the job done. Keeping hand tools in good working order can also help protect landscapers from repetitive-stress injuries.
3. **Know your machine:** A lot of power tools—like tillers, blowers, mowers, and trenchers—can cause severe injuries if they malfunction or are used incorrectly. Workers should always read the safety manual before using a new tool for the first time.
4. **Be careful with repairs**: Before attempting to fix or clear a

jam from a power tool or mower, make sure that the power supply is turned off and all the blades have stopped moving. Too many landscapers experience tragic amputations from the spinning blades in lawnmowers and other tools.

5. **Introduce a Safety Procedure to Your Site;** if you are a landscaping contractor, you might be working with a team of professional landscapers. In this case, the safety of your teammates is your responsibility. To protect your employees, you need to establish a safety procedure for your work location. Regular training and safety updates make perfect practice for a safer work environment. This is also a great idea to show your care and encourage your team to perform well without compromising on safety.
6. **Beat the Heat;** don't let excessive heat take charge of your landscape workers this summer. According to OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration), the landscaping industry is one of the most affected industries by heat-related illness. If you don't want the scorching heat to impact your team, you should focus on creating a program to protect your employees from sun exposure and heat illness. Encourage workers to stay hydrated and take breaks whenever they feel low. Make them wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants, and loose hats to cover their body and use glasses for eye protection. Also, learn the symptoms of heat exhaustion or heat stroke and know what to do in an emergency.
7. **Restrict Access to Your Working Location;** if you're working on a site individually or with your team, it's an ideal to set up a perimeter and ensure that only employees working on the location have access to it. Non-employees coming into a work site is a common cause of mishaps. So make sure only necessary people have access to your site while your working.
8. **Carry out Walk-around Inspections**; if you want to ensure your and your team's safety, taking out some time from your schedule to do an inspection. Thoroughly examining all the machinery and tools before starting your operation can really help reduce the risk of on-site accidents. Inspect

every detail carefully and if something seems slightly off or wrong, say something. Be diligent to look for cracks, cuts, leaks, and signs of wear and tear.

9. **Work on Your Driving Safety** With an increasing workload in the summer, your crew members are on the road more. According to the report by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, a car crash takes place every 5 seconds in the U.S and most of these accidents happen when people are driving during their working hours. To reduce your risk of getting into an accident, you should include a driver-safety program into your landscaping business that involves training drivers to operate vehicles with trailers.

Also, be sure to show drivers proper lifting, load capacities and secure transportation protocols. Tell them not to over-exceed the specified load capacity of their vehicles as it can result in road accidents.

FINAL WORD

Landscaping work does not appear at first glance to be work area that is fraught with workplace hazards. But on analysis, it is clear that heat stress, overexertion, hearing loss, hand-arm vibration and chemical exposure dispel that notion.