Landscaping – Walking surface awareness Meeting Kit

WHAT’S AT STAKE

In landscaping, our work takes us across a huge variety of terrains: from smooth lawns to uneven gardens, rocky slopes, and sometimes even construction sites. This constant change in walking surfaces means we’re exposed to a wide range of hazards that can lead to slips, trips, and falls. These aren’t just minor inconveniences; they can result in serious injuries like sprained ankles, twisted knees, broken bones, and even head trauma. These injuries can lead to lost time from work, impacting our income and productivity.

WHAT’S THE DANGER

Walking surface hazards are a common occurrence in landscaping. It’s easy to become accustomed to the various terrains we encounter, but this familiarity can lead to complacency, which is when accidents are more likely to happen.

- Uneven terrain, including slopes, holes, ruts, and uneven ground, is a major culprit. These surface irregularities can easily cause ankle sprains, trips, and falls, especially when carrying equipment or materials.
- Obstructions, such as tools, hoses, branches, debris, and other objects left on walkways or work areas, are another frequent hazard. These items create tripping hazards that can lead to falls and potential injuries.
- Wet or slippery surfaces, caused by rain, dew, ice, mud, spilled liquids like fuel or oil, and even wet grass, significantly increase the risk of slips and falls. These conditions reduce traction and make it difficult to maintain balance.
- Poor lighting, whether due to low-light conditions, working

at night, or working in shaded areas, makes it harder to see potential hazards. This reduced visibility increases the likelihood of tripping over unseen obstacles or misjudging uneven surfaces.

- Hidden hazards, like covered holes, low-lying branches obscured by vegetation, or objects hidden under debris, pose a significant danger. Because they are not readily visible, they can easily cause unexpected trips and falls.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Landscaping presents unique walking surface challenges. From uneven ground to hidden obstacles, it’s essential to be observant and proactive in identifying and mitigating these risks. By observing walking surfaces and anticipating potential hazards, we can significantly reduce the risk of slips, trips, and falls.

Pre-Work Assessment and Preparation:

Before starting any task, take a moment to assess the walking surface. Look for potential hazards and plan a safe path. This includes checking for uneven terrain like slopes, holes, and ruts, as well as any obstructions such as tools, hoses, branches, or debris. Wear sturdy, slip-resistant work boots with good ankle support. Avoid wearing sandals, sneakers with worn treads, or other inappropriate footwear that doesn’t provide adequate traction and support.

Safe Walking Practices During Work:

While working, pay attention to where you’re walking. Don’t be distracted by your phone, conversations, or other tasks. When possible, use designated walkways and paths. Avoid taking shortcuts across uneven terrain or through cluttered areas. It’s important to maintain good housekeeping by keeping work areas clear of obstructions. Properly store tools and equipment when not in use and clean up any spills immediately.

Adjusting to Environmental Conditions:

Be extra cautious in wet, icy, or low-light conditions. Slow down and take smaller steps to maintain better balance. Use extra caution when walking on slopes or uneven ground, as these surfaces are more challenging to navigate. If you must work in low-light conditions, use adequate lighting, such as flashlights or portable work lights, to illuminate your path and identify potential hazards.

Specific Considerations for Certain Tasks:

When carrying loads, make sure you have a clear view of where you're going. Use proper lifting techniques to avoid straining yourself, as this can affect your balance and increase your risk of falling. Finally, use extra caution when working near drop-offs, excavations, or other edges. Use barriers or warning signs if necessary to prevent accidental falls.

In Case of a Slip, Trip, or Fall:

- **Try to protect your head and torso:** If you feel yourself falling, try to protect your head and torso by tucking your chin to your chest and using your arms to brace yourself.
- **Relax your body:** Instead of tensing up, try to relax as much as possible. This can help to reduce the severity of injuries.
- **Assess yourself after the fall:** After the fall, take a moment to assess yourself for any injuries. If you are injured, seek first aid or medical attention immediately.
- **Report the incident:** Report all falls, even minor ones, to your supervisor. This helps to identify potential hazards and prevent future accidents.

FINAL WORD

Remember, staying safe on our feet is everyone's responsibility. It's about being vigilant, paying attention to our surroundings, and making smart choices every step of the way.