

Begin the New Year With a Safety Program



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It's the start of the new year and time for resolutions. One important resolution you should make in 2010 is to bump up your safety program. According to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), an average of 197 landscape industry employees died from injuries on the job each year between 2003 and 2006. At that time, workers in the landscape industry made up less than 1 percent of the total workforce in the United States, but accounted for 3.5 percent of occupational fatalities—and those are just deaths, that doesn't account for nonfatal injuries that occurred on the job.

This is one of the most dangerous industries to be a part of, but until an injury or fatality becomes a reality at your business, you may not think about it. Every job you perform during the day has a risk of injury or death, from the moment you step into your truck in the morning to drive to the job site until you make it back to the shop at the end of the day. You may not think how dangerous it is to trim the hedges on a property, but if a hedge trimmer is not used properly, it could result in lacerated fingers. You may also not think about sun exposure, but spending hours outside in the hot sun can have many consequences, including heat stroke, sun stroke and even skin cancer. What about ear protection? A sound reaching 85 dB or stronger can permanently damage your hearing, and the majority of the tools and equipment you use during the day are rated over that, including lawn mowers and wood chippers. That's just the beginning. Workers in the landscape industry work with all kinds of machinery, chemicals and pesticides, hand tools and motor vehicles. You need to look at every task that you and your employees perform during the day and identify the possible hazards so you can prevent an injury from occurring.

Make it a goal this year to put together a program for your employees, and post it where everyone can see it. You can start by holding regular safety

meetings to set up a preliminary plan. Follow-up meetings will give you a chance to address new safety issues and make sure that everyone is following the safety protocol. Hand out safety gear to all of your employees, such as gloves, safety glasses, ear protection and anything else that they need for their specific duties, and make it a workplace rule that they use it.

If you're not sure where to start, there are many resources out there for you to turn to for information. The OSHA Web site is a good place to start (www.osha.gov/SLTC/landscaping/solutions.html); it has specific content for the landscape and horticultural services industry and includes information such as fact sheets and government safety regulations. Another good resource is the NIOSH Web site (www.cdc.gov/niosh/). You can also look online for a template to set up a written safety plan. You might also want to check with your insurance agent for any resources they may have.

Any small step you take toward keeping yourself and your workers safe is a big one. You owe it to them to keep them safe!



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