

Conducting Effective Safety Orientation and Refresher Sessions

Key Points

- The spring start-up period is a particularly high-risk season for landscape companies due to increased numbers of new hires who have no experience with the companies' safety cultures. In addition, current and seasonal employees might have forgotten safety procedures associated with tasks they haven't performed during winter months.
- This could be a good time to assess, update and improve your safety-orientation practices ahead of the spring hiring season. The slower winter months also offer an opportunity for refresher training for current employees.
- Approximately one-third of occupational injuries and illnesses requiring days away from work involve employees who have been on the job less than one year, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. The Toronto-based Institute for Work & Health found employees in their first month on the job are three times more likely to sustain lost-time injuries than workers who have been doing the same job for more than a year.
- Two prime reasons new employees are more likely to get hurt are that supervisors often think new workers know more than they do and new employees can be afraid to ask questions.
- All employees should participate in a refresher safety-orientation session at least annually to maintain familiarity with company safety policies and learn about regulatory changes and safety program updates/revisions.

Employers' and Supervisors' Checklist:

Safety Orientation

- ✓ Follow all federal, state and local requirements related to safety training. For national regulations, see federal OSHA's publication "[Training Requirements in OSHA Standards.](#)"
- ✓ Know that, in general, federal OSHA requires you to: train employees in a language they can understand; teach employees to recognize, avoid and prevent unsafe conditions; explain regulations applicable to employees' work environments; and train employees to safely any poisons, caustics, toxic or flammable materials they are required to use.
- ✓ Ensure all new employees attend safety orientation before performing any job duties. Don't assume a person who has worked in the landscape industry previously was properly trained by a former employer.
- ✓ Ask your company's safety committee whether safety-orientation revisions are needed due to regulatory changes, employee suggestions, incidents or close calls during the past year, etc. If your company doesn't have a safety committee, see [this article](#) for guidance on creating one.
- ✓ Directly ask employees, especially those hired in the past year, for suggestions for improving your safety orientation. You could provide a box where employees could submit pieces of paper containing their anonymous recommendations.
- ✓ Choose people in your organization who have the best teaching skills to lead safety orientation and

training sessions. Effective trainers encourage participation by all group members and are capable of facilitating meetings without dominating them or allowing others to do so.

- ✓ If any employee cannot fully understand training in English, provide an interpreter. You might find within your own staff a person competent in both English and your non-English-speaking worker's language. If not, you could find an interpreter through: community-based agencies serving Hispanics/Latinos (or other populations), foreign language departments at local colleges or universities, migrant health clinics, and local churches with non-English-speaking members.
- ✓ Do not assume employees can read and write, even in their own native language. For this reason, make sure trainers do not present any information in writing alone.
- ✓ If non-native English speakers are among your new hires, instruct trainers not to use slang or jargon. Non-native speakers are not likely to understand it.
- ✓ Make sure trainers are aware direct eye contact with a person in authority is interpreted as disrespectful in most Hispanic cultures. If a Hispanic worker isn't looking directly at a presenter during safety training, it doesn't mean he/she isn't paying attention.
- ✓ Instruct trainers to strongly encourage questions from employees throughout safety-orientation sessions. Teens often avoid questions because they fear looking "stupid," and Hispanic employees might think asking questions is disrespectful.
- ✓ Keep training sessions as small as possible. This facilitates participation and allows trainers detect lack of understanding through facial expressions.
- ✓ Ensure safety orientation covers, at a minimum:
 - Management's commitment to safety
 - Your company's safety and health program/policies/procedures; If your company doesn't have a formal, written program, see this [previous article](#) for guidance.
 - Applicable safety and health regulatory requirements
 - Employer/employee rights, responsibilities and expectations
 - Hazard identification, assessment and correction
 - Instructions on how to report hazards and potential hazards and provide safety suggestions
 - Procedures for reporting accidents/incidents, close calls and on-the-job injuries or illnesses
 - Job-task-specific skills and safety precautions
 - Hands-on training on all vehicles and equipment employees will be required to operate
 - How to inspect vehicles and equipment
 - Review of the employee preapproval/certification required prior to machinery operation (Operating a motor vehicle at work is prohibited for 16-year-olds and allowed only under limited circumstances for 17-year-olds. Child labor laws also ban those under 18 from operating many types of mobile machinery.)
 - Personal protective equipment (PPE), including a hands-on demonstration of all PPE to be assigned to employees
 - A tour of buildings and grounds to familiarize new employees with safety equipment, signage, exits and items such as fire extinguishers that could be critical during an emergency
 - Emergency procedures
 - [Proper lifting techniques](#) and [ergonomics training](#) (particularly important for older workers)
 - Hazard communication
 - Working in hot and cold environments
 - All other OSHA-required training
 - Orientation verification/evaluation process (to ensure information was clearly presented and understood)

- ✓ Consider the form your safety-orientation sessions should take. The types of safety training generally most effective for landscape companies are:
 - Hands-on training or demonstrations (for example, having employees put on PPE or show how to correctly start a piece of equipment)
 - Visual training (through videos, photographs, illustrations and other visual aids)
 - Oral training (in a language your workers understand)
- ✓ Keep in mind the basic tenets of adult learning:
 - Adults learn best when they have decided they need to learn. Tell them why the information you're presenting is relevant.
 - Adults have significant life experience that should be acknowledged. Invite them to share experiences and knowledge.
 - Adults resent instructors who talk down to them or ignore their contributions.
 - Adults learn more when they actively participate in training.
 - Adults retain more information when they immediately apply it.
 - Adults learn better when an instructor uses multiple teaching techniques. Try to implement three kinds of "learning exchanges" during training: participant-to-participant; participant-to-facilitator; and facilitator-to-participant.
- ✓ Document safety-orientation sessions in writing.
- ✓ Remember safety orientation should be a prelude to more extensive safety training. Safety tailgate training, seasonal training and other as-needed training can reinforce learning. NALP offers a [Safety Tailgate Training Manual](#) with topics for every week of the year.
- ✓ See this [previous article](#) for additional guidance on training new employees.
- ✓ For more tips on training teen, older and Hispanic workers, see [this article](#).

Refresher training

- ✓ Know that while refresher training should touch on all the topics mentioned above, it makes sense to emphasize changes to your company's safety program and particular areas in which our industry and your company struggles.
- ✓ To help you decide what to stress in refresher training sessions:
 - Review your company's accident/incident, close-call, injury and illness records.
 - Talk with your insurer/workers' compensation carrier and with others in the industry. Ask about the types of incidents they are seeing.
 - Ask your safety committee and employees for ideas.

Plan seasonal refresher training based on the types of work crew members do during different parts of the year. Seasonal topics to consider for the next few months include: [preventing heat-related illnesses](#); [preventing skin cancer](#); [avoiding stinging insects and scorpions](#); [avoiding snakes and spiders](#); [avoiding mosquito and tick-borne diseases](#); and [operating lawn mowers](#) and other lawn- and plant-care-related tools and equipment.

Employee dos and don'ts

Do:

- Know that parts of your job are inherently dangerous, but through safety orientation and refresher training, risks can be greatly minimized.
- Understand the purpose of safety-orientation sessions and other safety training is to help you go home uninjured to your family every day.
- Know you have a right to: a safe workplace; receive training in clear language you understand;

safety equipment; speak up about safety and report work-related injuries without being punished; refuse unsafe work conditions and tasks.

- Provide input and ideas and answer questions during safety-training sessions.
- During any safety-training sessions, ask questions you have about the topic being discussed and bring up general safety questions and/or concerns.
- If you don't fully understand training in English, ask your supervisor to provide an interpreter and safety videos and publications in your native language.

Don't

- Think asking questions is wrong. If you don't completely understand a topic presented during safety training, ask for clarification. Your employer wants you to do this. Know that asking questions does not make you look unintelligent or disrespectful. Asking sincere questions is not considered disrespectful in American culture. If a concept is unclear to you, others are likely confused as well, and the trainer needs to explain or demonstrate in a different manner.
- Be afraid to answer questions. Participation in a discussion is vital for effective safety training. You won't be reprimanded or made fun of for wrong answers.
- Become involved in side conversations. This will cause you and others to miss important information.
- Begin a task or operate machinery before you have been trained to do so safely and have no doubts about how to proceed. You should complete hands-on training and understand all operating and safety guidelines for each particular piece of equipment you're asked to use before you operate it.
- Operate vehicles or equipment you're prohibited from using because of your age or lack of certification. Operating a motor vehicle at work is prohibited for 16-year-olds and allowed only under limited circumstances for 17-year-olds. Laws also ban those under age 18 from operating many types of mobile machinery. If you are unsure, ask your crew leader/supervisor.

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