Creating Safe Environments at Company Facilities

Key Points

- Keeping company facilities and grounds – including offices, repair shops, equipment yards, material- and tool-storage areas and parking lots – hazard free is key to preventing accidents and injuries and preserving a positive public image.
- In late summer and early fall, this can be particularly challenging since shops might be filled with tools and equipment needing repairs/maintenance after much use, and attention to the home front might have been lax during the busy lawn-care season.
- If policies for upkeep and behavior in all areas are clearly communicated and followed, maintaining a safe environment can become second nature for your entire team, year round.

Employers’ and Supervisors’ Checklist

General

- Create good-housekeeping rules for each area of your company’s facilities and grounds. Post and communicate the rules to workers and strictly enforce them.
- Post large “Keep Out – Employees Only” signs at entrances to your garage, shop, equipment yard and other areas that are off-limits to customers and other visitors.
- Post signs with appropriate warnings, precautions and emergency procedures in your shop, equipment yard and storage areas. In addition to 911, list phone numbers of emergency responders. Post signs in more than one language, if necessary, to communicate the information in a way all employees will understand.
- Make sure a landline phone is located in each area of your building(s) and an emergency sheet is kept beside each phone. The sheet should list 911 procedures and the numbers of other emergency responders, hospitals and local urgent-care centers.
- Ensure at least one multipurpose fire extinguisher is prominently located in every area of your facility. Regularly inspect fire extinguishers and train workers to properly use them.
- Place at least one first-aid kit in every area of your company’s facilities. Federal OSHA requires you to provide easily accessible kits that contain basic supplies necessary for addressing typical first-aid needs. Contents should be in sealed packages within a weatherproof container.
- Have someone check kits weekly to ensure expended items are replaced.
- Take measures to prevent slips and trips, the third leading cause of injury in the landscape, lawn care and plant nursery industry, according to data from insurance company CNA.
- Designate a supervisor or supervisors to check areas for slip-and-trip hazards before work begins each day and throughout the day.
- Train employees to identify and address slip-and-trip hazards.
- Prohibit running, and do not allow employees to jump on or off equipment or vehicles.
- Keep parking areas, walkways and building entrances clear of snow and ice during winter months.
- Ensure lighting is adequate for the tasks employees are performing.
Establish a zero-tolerance policy toward workplace violence through a well written and implemented workplace-violence-prevention program. The policy should cover all workers, clients, visitors, subcontractors and anyone else who could come in contact with company personnel.

Secure your facilities. Where appropriate, install video surveillance, extra lighting and alarm systems. Control access through identification badges and electronic keys.

If hazardous chemicals are present at your company’s facilities, know federal OSHA’s Hazard Communication Standard requires you to develop a written hazard communication program, provide education and training to employees, maintain current safety data sheets (SDS) for all chemicals employees are required to handle, ensure chemical containers are properly labeled and keep an up-to-date log of all hazardous chemicals used.

In accordance with federal OSHA regulations, provide emergency eyewash stations workers can access within 10 seconds or approximately 55 feet if they get chemicals in their eyes.

Make sure employees know the locations of SDSs and eyewash stations.

Develop an emergency-action plan that addresses all emergency situations, including fire and severe weather, your company and employees could face. Post the plan in highly visible places in your buildings.

Develop a system for knowing who is in company buildings or on company grounds in the event of an emergency. Keep a list of employees and maintain a visitor log at the front desk or in the reception area. Assign someone to take the lists to assembly areas and compare the names on the lists to those present.

Establish an alarm system with a distinctive signal for each purpose, such as severe weather, fire or an intruder.

Employ available resources to help you conduct safety audits. Resources include your insurance carrier, your local fire department and electric utility.

Develop checklists for supervisors to use when inspecting buildings and grounds. Sample checklists are part of the NALP/STARS Safe Company Program for Landscape Professionals. An updated version of the manual will be available this fall.

**Repair Shop**

Make sure the shop supervisor checks for potential fire and electrical hazards daily. Potential hazards include welding or painting operations close to combustible materials, overloaded electrical outlets, frayed cords, improperly grounded electrical equipment, sparks coming from powered machinery or equipment, improper storage of paint or chemicals and oily rags or other combustible materials left on the floor.

Strictly enforce “No Smoking” rules.

Prohibit use of internal-combustion engines or tools in enclosed or poorly ventilated areas. Place warning labels on these tools. For example: WARNING – Carbon monoxide produced during use can kill – Do not use indoors or in other sheltered areas.

Educate workers about sources of carbon monoxide and conditions that might result in carbon-monoxide poisoning.

Provide tools powered by electricity or compressed air if employees will be working in a poorly ventilated or confined space.

Follow manufacturers’ recommendations for equipment maintenance to reduce carbon-monoxide emissions.

Provide appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) for each repair-shop activity (safety glasses or goggles, hearing protection, respirators, protective gloves, welding aprons, face shields, etc.) and train employees in its use. Ensure PPE can be stored in a clean, safe place in close proximity to the work area.

Require workers to wear long-sleeved shirts, pants and sturdy shoes or boots with good traction (steel-toed footwear when needed).
✓ Require employees working with powered equipment to remove jewelry and keep long hair tied back.
✓ Stress the importance of keeping safety guards and shields in place, never bypassing safety devices and complying with your company’s lockout/tag-out procedures.

Equipment yard/Parking lots
✓ Know that equipment yards and parking lots are often the sites of preventable incidents.
✓ Ensure all parking areas are clearly marked.
✓ Post 5 MPH speed-limit signs in parking lots and all areas with vehicle traffic.
✓ Train, and re-train vehicle and equipment operators to pay close attention to their surroundings, especially before backing up.
✓ Devise traffic-control plans for equipment yards. These plans coordinate the flow of moving equipment, workers and vehicles to reduce or eliminate the need for vehicles/equipment to back up or cross paths with people.
✓ Make it your policy for spotters to be used when company vehicles back up in your equipment yard or inside buildings/garages.
✓ Provide spotters with high-visibility clothing.
✓ Follow all federal, state and local regulations related to backing vehicles/equipment and using spotters.

Crew Members’ Dos and Don’ts

Do:
• Check your area for slip-and-trip hazards before beginning work each day.
• Ensure high-traffic areas of the work area are clear of obstructions.
• Practice “good housekeeping” at all times. Keep your work area clear of clutter. Put tools, equipment, etc. back in designated places after use.
• Promptly clean up chemical spills or notify a supervisor if you are not authorized to do so. Use caution tape and warning signs to designate chemical-spill areas. Keep unauthorized people away.
• Clean up grease, water and other non-chemical spills when you notice them.
• Follow your company’s training regarding when to use a vehicle/equipment spotter, how to serve as a spotter and how to work with a spotter.
• Wear a reflective vest when serving as a spotter and use hand signals in accordance with your company’s training.
• Know what constitutes violent or potentially violent behavior and immediately report it to your supervisor.
• Know where to find safety data sheets (SDSs) and eyewash stations.
• If severe weather approaches, cover loose materials, store chemicals and tools and secure equipment, trashcans and other outdoor objects that could be picked up by wind or carried away by heavy rain.
• Understand your company’s alarm system for warning you about emergencies.
• Know the symptoms of carbon-monoxide poisoning (headache, fatigue, dizziness, drowsiness, nausea, chest tightness, confusion, personality changes, muscle weakness). If you notice these symptoms in yourself or others, turn off equipment, encourage everyone to leave the area and report the situation to a supervisor.
• Follow your company’s equipment lockout/tag-out procedures.

Don’t:
• Move a vehicle or machine in an equipment yard or inside a building, garage or repair shop unless a spotter is directing you.
- Pass behind a moving vehicle/machine without communicating this need to the spotter and receiving a signal continue.
- Run anywhere on company property or jobsites.
- Leave electrical cords or hoses across walkways or paths.
- Reuse or refill a chemical container unless your supervisor/crew leader tells you to do so and you are following instructions on the product label.
- Put chemicals in unlabeled containers.
- Go near windows or plumbing fixtures or use corded telephones, computers or electrical tools/appliances when thunder can be heard and for 30 minutes after the last sound of thunder.
- Fail to respond to alarms or emergency-related instructions from management or co-workers performing duties under your company’s emergency plan.
- Run an engine in an enclosed or semi-enclosed space for any reason, even if doors/windows are open and you are using a fan.

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