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Safety\$ense

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Editor's note: PASS ON EACH ISSUE OF THIS NEWSLETTER TO EVERYONE WITH SAFETY RESPONSIBILITIES AT YOUR COMPANY.

How to Best Present and Get the Most from Safety Tailgate Training

Key Points

- Brief, regular, safety-training sessions—often called tailgate or toolbox training meetings—have been so effective in the construction industry that they've spilled over into other industries, including the landscape and lawn care industry. Safety tailgate training is typically conducted on jobsites and involves gathering a small group of workers (often around a truck's tailgate) for a short session on a single topic.
- Because of their frequency and brevity (10 to 30 minutes), these sessions can help crew leaders and members keep safety top of mind while holding employees' interest. Most importantly, they can prevent accidents and illnesses—and reduce associated costs.
- Even when everyone has the best intentions, however, any type of training can be ineffective. Tailgate training can focus on the wrong topic or be delivered at the wrong time. Crew leaders and supervisors are not professional educators, yet basic knowledge of how adults learn and how to present information accordingly is critical. Crew members might not understand how to participate in tailgate training in a way that allows them and their co-workers to reap maximum benefits from it. The following tips can help both groups get the most from safety tailgate training.

Checklist for Employers, Supervisors, and Crew Leaders

- ✓ Select a solid curriculum relevant to your company's work as the basis for your tailgate-training program. You can write your own material or use an industry-specific guide such as PLANET's recently released [Safety Tailgate Training Manual](#).
- ✓ Train the trainers. Crew leaders or supervisors heading tailgate-training sessions need to know the subject matter they'll be covering and how to best present it.
- ✓ Show employees you take safety seriously by setting an excellent example. Nothing will ruin your credibility as a manager/trainer faster than not following guidelines set forth in company policy or previous meetings.
- ✓ Understand the basics of adult learning:
 - Adults learn quickly and best when they have decided they need to learn for a particular reason. Tell them why the information you're presenting is relevant to their work and lives.
 - 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 ideas and concerns.
 - Adults learn more when they actively participate in training.
 - Adults retain more information when they immediately apply it.
 - Adults learn best when new information is reinforced and repeated.
 - Adults learn better when an instructor uses multiple teaching techniques. Implement three kinds of "learning exchanges" during training: participant-to-participant, which allows crew members to learn from one another's experiences; participant-to-facilitator, which acknowledges that a group of participants might have more extensive knowledge in certain areas than an individual trainer; and facilitator-to-participant, in which the trainer guides discussions, encourages participation, draws out and adds information as needed, and highlights key points.
- ✓ Conduct tailgate-training sessions on a regular basis. Once a week works well. Hold training sessions early in the week (but not on Mondays) and early in the day. At the end of the day, workers will be tired and ready to go home.
- ✓ Create and post a calendar with scheduled training dates/times and stick to it.
- ✓ For each meeting, choose a topic that relates to work the crew is doing or will be doing soon.

- ✓ Pick a quiet, logical meeting location where crew members will be comfortable and focused; for example, around the tailgate of a truck or in an area with a safety concern. If your topic involves a particular type of machine, tool or PPE, conduct the training near this equipment or have samples with you so you can demonstrate points as needed.
- ✓ Before each tailgate meeting, inspect the jobsite for hazards related to your topic, read over the material you plan to cover and ensure you understand all terms/concepts and any laws, regulations, and company rules related to the topic, and review your company's recent accident and close-call reports.
- ✓ Begin with a real-life example, when possible, or with information that will capture the crew's interest. You can search news reports on the Internet to learn about accidents related to your topic.
- ✓ Tell the crew where the hazard you're discussing can be found at the particular jobsite or where/when they'll be doing work related to the topic.
- ✓ Ask questions instead of lecturing. Introduce each new point by asking the crew a question. After you ask a question, wait a short time for crew members to think, and then ask volunteers to answer. Use answers as a springboard for discussion.
- ✓ Encourage the crew to speak—don't just read the answers from your training material.
- ✓ Make sure crew members feel what they have to say will be heard with respect. Never make fun of anyone or put down anyone. Correct misinformation in a positive manner and add information as needed.
- ✓ If you ask a question and no one has an answer, restate it using simple, straightforward language. If there is still no response, rephrase the question by asking about personal experience. For instance, no one answers the question, "What are the safety and social effects of hearing loss?" Try asking, "Do you know anyone with hearing loss caused by working in a noisy environment? How does this affect his/her life?"
- ✓ Use materials and language that take into account multilingual workers. Train to the lowest literacy level, and don't use words workers are unlikely to understand. Use pictograms, visuals, or a translator, if needed.
- ✓ Carefully watch facial expressions for signs crew members don't understand something. If you don't think they understood, immediately correct the presentation method or wording.
- ✓ Limit the time any one person talks. If a crew member is talking too much, tactfully invite someone else to speak. Wait until the person takes a breath, then quickly identify another crew member and say, "What do you think about this?"
- ✓ Don't guess answers to questions. If you don't know the answer, write down the question, promise to find out the answer and then follow up with the individual and group.
- ✓ Keep sessions on topic. If the crew's questions and comments drift too much, tell them their conversation would make a great topic for an upcoming safety meeting (or their concerns will be addressed outside of the meeting).
- ✓ Leave enough time at the end of each meeting for crew members to ask questions related to the topic and to cover general safety issues such as current jobsite conditions, recent incidents, and concerns raised at the last meeting or brought up since then. Also, encourage crew members to contact you or another supervisor/crew leader immediately about any safety issues or hazards they notice.
- ✓ Document all training sessions. Have each crew member sign a form stating the day's date, topic, and the trainer's name. Some training materials include these sheets, but you can also make your own. You might also have crew members complete brief true/false quizzes related to each topic (again, some curricula include these). Copies of signed training sheets and completed true/false quizzes allow you to document and keep track of employees' training and its effectiveness.
- ✓ File these documents according to your company's policy.
- ✓ Look into complaints, concerns, and suggestions crew members bring up and report back to them.

Employee Dos and Don'ts

Do:

- Know that parts of your job, such as working with tools and machinery, from heights, and around electricity, are inherently dangerous but, through effective safety training, risks can be greatly minimized.
- Know that safety training, including tailgate talks, is intended to ensure you go home to your family unharmed each day.
- Be aware that safety training cannot be effective without your sincere participation and input.
- Be alert and attentive during safety-training sessions. If something is preventing this (sun in your eyes, noise from nearby work, etc.), tell the trainer.
- Attempt to answer questions from the trainer.
- Share information and experiences that could be beneficial to other crew members or the trainer.
- During the main portion of the tailgate meeting, focus your input on the day's topic. If a different safety topic comes to

mind, mention it to the trainer as a potential topic for another day.

- At the end of each session, ask any questions you have about the day's topic that have not been answered. Also bring up any safety concerns you have in general or in regard to the current jobsite.

Don't:

- 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.
- Take over the discussion for long periods of time. Other members of the crew should contribute as well.
- Say nothing if you don't understand a concept or rule being presented. Others are likely confused as well, and the trainer needs to explain or demonstrate in a different manner.
- Be argumentative or obstinate during safety meetings. If you think something said during a session was wrong and was not corrected despite your polite disagreement, bring it up with a supervisor after the meeting.
- Continually disagree with another person because of an ongoing personality clash between the two of you. This can make training ineffective for the entire crew.
- Become involved in side conversations. This will cause you and others to miss important information.

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