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

**Making Safety a Top Priority**

**Key Points**
- A safe working environment is dependent on everyone in your organization—from the company owner to the most recent seasonal hire—making safety and health a top priority. All employees should understand safety is key to the company’s mission and profitability.
- In some minds, safety competes with other business priorities, such as production and turning the highest possible profit. This is not the case, however; attention to safety works hand in hand with these goals. The direct and indirect costs of accidents and the organizational costs (such as fear and lack of trust) of failing to prioritize safety more than outweigh the dollars required to build an excellent safety program and culture.
- An accident can happen in a split second—and the consequences are often long term. In the landscaping and horticultural industry, as in others, many injuries, illnesses, and deaths occur as a result of hazards that are widely known yet inadequately addressed.
- These accidents can be prevented when employers and supervisors provide effective training and emphasize the importance of safety, and when crew members take responsibility for their own safety and that of their co-workers.

**Employers’ and Supervisors’ Checklist**
- Understand that an effective safety and health program can save $4 to $6 for every $1 invested (federal OSHA). It pays off in lower costs (workers’ compensation, lost workdays, insurance premiums, fines, etc.), increased productivity, and higher employee morale.
- Build a strong safety culture. According to federal OSHA, this has the greatest impact on accident reduction compared to other processes. Safety cultures consist of shared beliefs, practices, and attitudes and the atmosphere they create. Management support of a safety culture often results in defining safety responsibilities at all levels of an organization, acquiring a safety director, providing resources for accident investigations, improving safety training, and implementing systems for establishing safety goals and measuring safety activities.
- Establish a written safety and health program that includes the five elements recommended by federal OSHA: management leadership and employee participation, workplace analysis, hazard prevention and control, safety and health training and education, and program evaluation.
- Post the company’s written safety and health policy for all employees to see, and give every employee a copy.
- Involve employees in policymaking on safety and health issues.
- Hold meetings that focus on safety and health. These can be additions to meetings you already have.
- Train crew leaders to recognize hazards and understand their safety-related responsibilities.
- Remind crew leaders to hold safety meetings at the beginning of each job and each day. They should point out hazards particular to the jobsite and types of work being done and ways danger can be mitigated.
- Stress to crew leaders that work must be completed safely.
- Emphasize to crew members on a regular basis that management wants them to follow the company’s safety policy so they won’t get hurt.
- Regularly and thoroughly maintain equipment.
- Ensure hazard-correction procedures are in place.
- Make sure employees know when and how to use and maintain personal protective equipment.
- Ensure crew members understand and follow safe work procedures.
Lead by example. Always follow your company’s safety rules and procedures.

Allow only properly trained employees to perform any job. Before any employee operates a tool or piece of equipment, make sure he/she is trained to use the particular model.

Pay particular attention to employees learning new tasks. Make sure they have the proper skills and hazard awareness.

Put in place a close-call or near-miss reporting procedure and investigate all incidents.

Encourage employees to report close calls and any hazardous conditions to their crew leaders. Ensure employees they will not be punished for doing so.

Provide safety rewards and incentives. Continually evaluate these policies to ensure their effectiveness. Generate employee pride and positive publicity for your company by entering safety recognition awards programs. Learn about PLANET’s program here.

Continually measure performance, communicate results, and celebrate successes. You can do this through current meetings, a bulletin board, and/or a comment box.

Take advantage of safety resources, such as those provided by federal OSHA and PLANET, and participate in safety programs, such as PLANET’s STARS Safe Company Program.

Employee Dos and Don’ts
Do:

- Think about how your work behavior affects your family. What would happen to them if you were seriously injured or killed?
- Follow your company’s safety rules and procedures at all times so you can go home safely to your family each day.
- Take responsibility for your own safety. Don’t consider safety someone else’s job (e.g., “If I need a respirator when using this chemical, someone would tell me.”).
- Keep personal protective equipment (PPE) handy so using it will become second nature to you.
- Stay focused on the task at hand. Don’t let your mind drift to other topics.
- Be on constant lookout for hazards. When you spot one, immediately eliminate it or report it to your crew leader/supervisor.
- Get a good night’s sleep before coming to work.
- Wear all the PPE we provide and require for each task you perform, and dress appropriately for the job.
- Pay close attention to hazard warning signs.
- If you don’t understand any portion of your company’s training program, ask your supervisor for clarification.
- Always drive cautiously and defensively.
- Inspect all guards, shields, and other safety devices for damage before each use of a machine or tool, and bring any problems to the attention of your supervisor.
- Read the label of every chemical you use and follow its application and PPE guidelines.
- Look out for your fellow crew members and point out unsafe behaviors.

Don’t:

- Engage in horseplay on the job.
- Engage in safety-compromising “contests” with other crew members (for example, trying to be the first one to the jobsite—and driving recklessly to get there).
- Be distracted by mobile electronic devices (leave them in a vehicle at jobsites).
- Rush through your work or take shortcuts.
- Perform any task until you understand the training associated with it.
- Operate vehicles or equipment if you are overly tired, sick, or under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or medication that could affect your alertness.
- Operate a machine or tool before you have received training on the particular model you will be using.
- Remove, bypass, or disable a guard, shield, or other safety device.

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