

SAFETY FIRST

...and last, and always

BY PRENTISS C. KNOTTS

Golf Course Superintendent

Eagle Creek County Club, Naples

While directing the golf course operations at a facility that I won't name, I observed (from a distance) a spray technician "formulating" a concoction to apply to the turf. I was unfamiliar with the specific technique he was using and approached for a more detailed examination of the procedure. The technician was preparing a mixture of insecticide to control several insect pests.

The material was in a soluble powder form and was being shaken directly into the tank. The insecticide was floating in the air and a large amount had become attached to the technician. In fact, his appearance was not unlike a honeybee that had been furiously working in flowers all day. His eyebrows were thick with the stuff and even the hairs in his nostrils were coated. I was so excited at what I was seeing that I just had to learn more.

"You're the spray tech?," I asked. "Yep!," he answered. "Been doing this a while, have you?," I continued. "Oh, four...no, five years," he responded. "I took over from Old Charlie," he volunteered. "Old Charlie (I write it this way because that's exactly the way it sounded, that is, 'Old' was his first name and 'Charlie,' his last) taught me everythin' I know. He was the head spray man around here for maybe 15 years. I took over after he dropped dead, in fact, right there — right where you're standin'. Been doin' it ever since."

Although this is a frightening scenario, this story is absolutely true!

I never had the pleasure of meeting Old Charlie, but I knew I had a tough battle in front of me to retrain his replacement and, hopefully, prevent a recurrence of the tragedy that had befallen

Old Charlie.

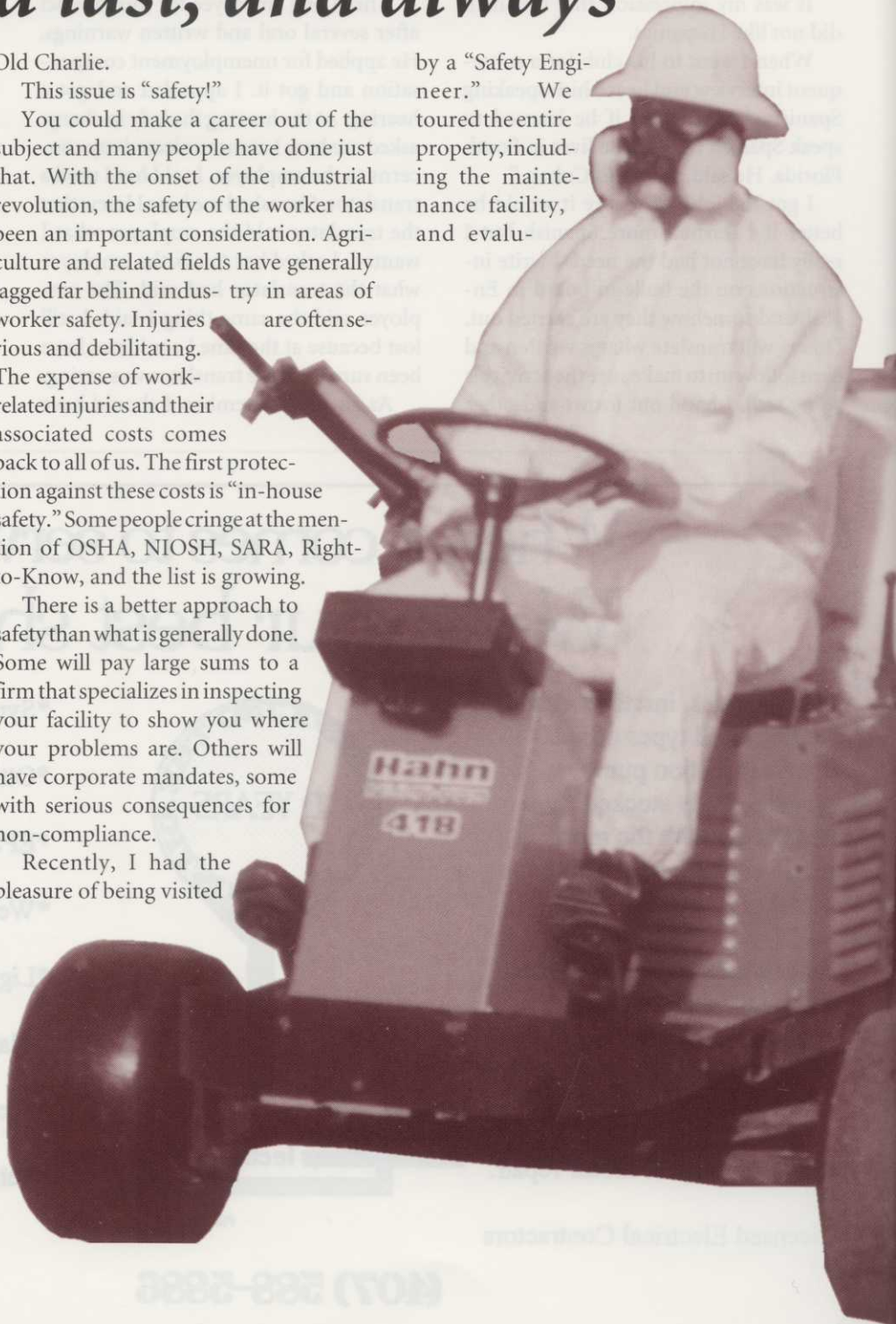
This issue is "safety!"

You could make a career out of the subject and many people have done just that. With the onset of the industrial revolution, the safety of the worker has been an important consideration. Agriculture and related fields have generally lagged far behind industry in areas of worker safety. Injuries are often serious and debilitating. The expense of work-related injuries and their associated costs comes back to all of us. The first protection against these costs is "in-house safety." Some people cringe at the mention of OSHA, NIOSH, SARA, Right-to-Know, and the list is growing.

There is a better approach to safety than what is generally done. Some will pay large sums to a firm that specializes in inspecting your facility to show you where your problems are. Others will have corporate mandates, some with serious consequences for non-compliance.

Recently, I had the pleasure of being visited

by a "Safety Engineer." We toured the entire property, including the maintenance facility, and evalu-



ated our site. The items that were pointed out during this tour were common to most golf course maintenance operations, but that only served to illustrate that the commonplace problems that we see daily are usually the most dangerous. In fact, most accidents occur because someone has become complacent about safety. This is the starting point for an effective safety program.

A very innovative safety expert that I met recently used the story of Sleeping Beauty to further illustrate the safety issue. Without stealing his entire lecture, suffice it to say that if Sleeping Beauty had not been beautiful, Prince Charming would probably have ridden away without stopping to investigate.

Safety,



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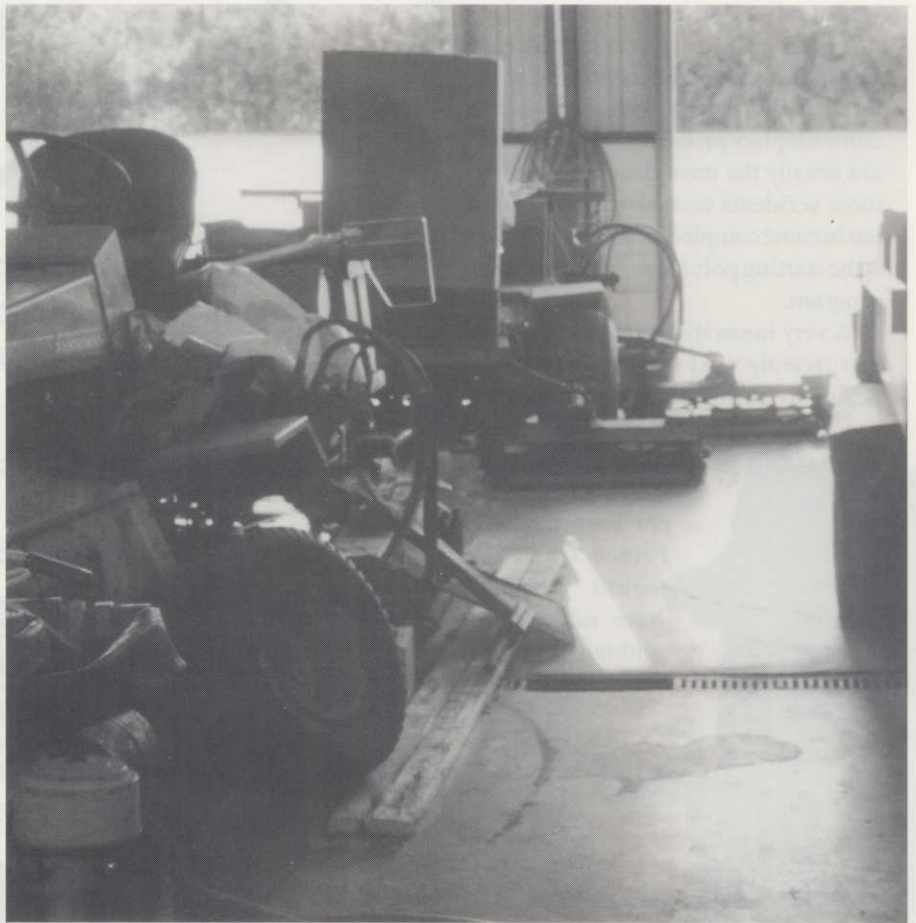
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however, does not allow us to simply ride away and pretend that we didn't see Sleeping Ugly. We just have to "get off the horse and pucker up!" In other words, we must embrace the regulations and the agencies responsible for monitoring compliance, rather than being fearful and apprehensive.

The first step is to simply make safety a priority and sell that idea to your staff and crew.

The assistant superintendent and the shop foreman will be the first line of communication on safety issues. Post signs and posters highlighting safety items like speed limits, fueling procedures, clear lanes, combustibles, etc.

Many companies will provide posters at no charge. Some posters are available from the regulatory agencies. Probably the most effective are those that are done "in-house." Better yet, ask your employ-



A jumble of machinery in the building that doesn't allow for unhindered exit is just asking for trouble.

ees to create the safety notices that are needed. Involvement in the program will help the employee remember the safety rules and give him/her a sense of ownership in the safety program.

One common mistake made by users

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and handlers of pesticides is the proper filing and use of the Manufacturer's Safety Data Sheet. The idea of the MSDS is to provide quick access to information about products being used in the workplace. Specifically, in the event of exposure, anyone can immediately access information to protect the exposed individual from additional injury. If this can't be easily done, most inspectors will strongly advise a revision of the system and, in some cases, issue written warnings about the methods used to access information from the MSDS.

The simplest solution is to maintain a book or folder of MSDS's that relate to only what is in current use. Products that were used in the past must be kept on file but that file may be "inactive." This will reduce the size of the book or folder and make the information inside much easier to find. Any employee that will use or





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come into contact with a hazardous material must be advised of the location of the MSDS and his/her right to access them. This part of the program falls under the Right-To-Know laws. RTK is a compliance area that should be the subject for entire training sessions.

A sign-up sheet or roll call form is necessary to keep records of the employees attending those sessions. The U.S. Department of Labor can assist with materials that can be used in training and compliance. Another good source of information is the public library. Your as-

sociation can also be a source of information and, probably even more importantly, experience. Superintendents that have been through the inspection process will usually be glad to relate those experiences and provide advice for the asking.

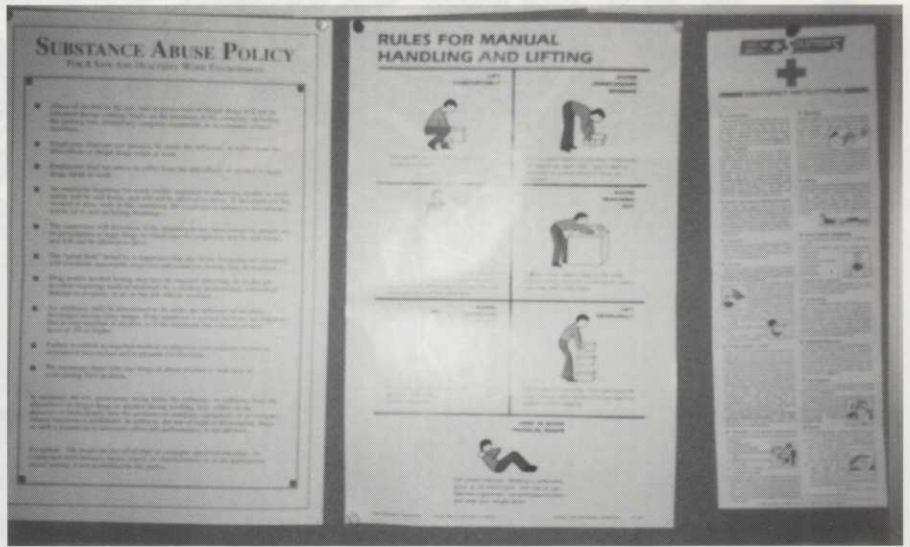
You and members of your staff should thoroughly inspect your own facility for unsafe conditions. For example, a jumble of machinery in the building that doesn't allow for unhindered exit is just asking for trouble. Old barrels and pesticide containers can be seen almost everywhere

you choose to look. Requiring the crew to protect themselves is also part of the process. Furnish safety equipment like goggles, gloves, rubber boots and gloves, coveralls, respirators, and, probably more important than all of this, provide the training to use these items properly.

Forming a safety committee made up of representatives from each department in the club provides consistency and continuity in a safety program. Regular, structured meetings of this committee assure a pro-active stance on safety and related

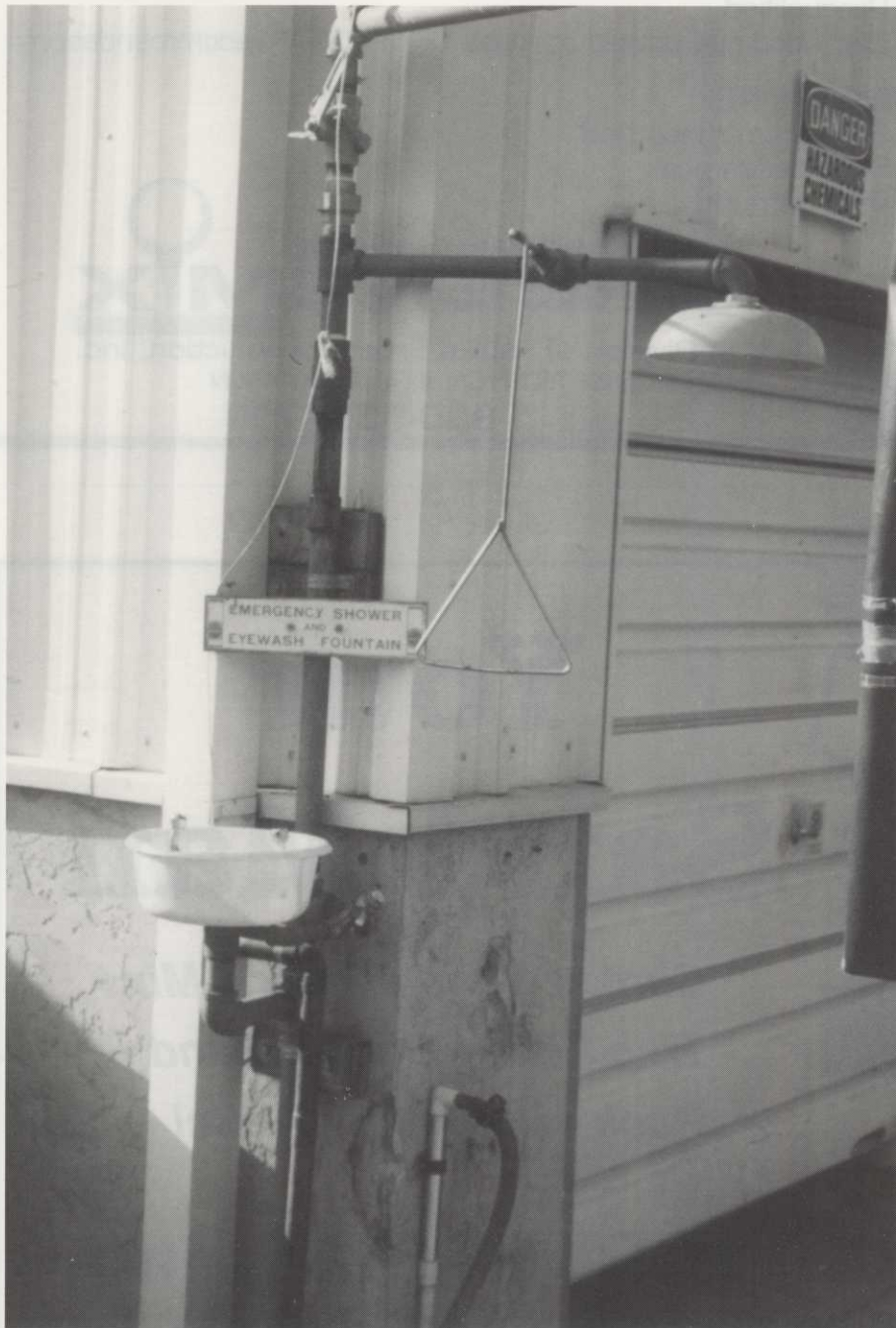


Certain types of tasks are better left to those that are experts in the area. Non-routine tasks are a cause of many injuries simply because the people involved are not familiar with the job.



Instructions on proper lifting techniques and basic first-aid, and a clearly-worded policy on substance abuse are all part of a good safety program.

The real issue in all of this is: Teach people not to be stupid.



An emergency shower and eyewash fountain are located as closely as possible to the site where the accident is likely to happen.

issues. Keeping good records of these meetings is strong evidence of a willingness to comply with regulations. Obviously, each committee member must take the message back to their respective departments; otherwise, the safety program won't work.

The market has been inundated with "compliance kits" that, in some cases really can help you implement an effective program. However, most of the necessary materials and information is available free of charge from the regulatory agencies themselves. Some of the more useful items available from other sources are tapes, both audio and video that can be effective tools for training.

Once you have begun a safety and compliance program, you will usually be surprised at the scope of the issues. Upon discovering one area that requires attention, several other areas may be revealed. The size of the undertaking is probably the most dangerous pitfall in the continued effectiveness of any program of this type. Avoiding this problem is easier than one would think.

Golf course superintendents are expert managers of mayhem.

Consider some of the projects and just day-to-day obstacles thrown into your path. Somehow we still seem to finish what we start and, eventually, the end arrives. The same is true of this exercise, with one notable exception. It never ends! New problems and issues arise; laws change; restrictions increase (and seldom decrease); and the challenge never goes away. Handle this the same way you would handle other maintenance operations. Guide and direct. Delegate and follow-up. Take one item and see it through to completion. Set meeting times and dead-





Having all safety notices in one place makes it easy for everyone to know right where to look.

lines in advance and stick to momentum and “life” in this kind of project. It

has become routine and is now as much a part of what we do as mowing schedules and fertilizer programs.

The real issue in all of this is: Teach people not to be stupid.

I once watched in amazement as a person stepped out of the bucket of a cherry picker to reach “one more limb” and fall 40 feet to the ground. Fortunately (?) for him, a large limb about two-thirds of the way down broke his fall (also, three ribs and one arm). Was that one limb worth it?

This particular accident occurred because the superintendent was too optimistic about the capabilities of his department. There comes a time when certain types of tasks are better left to those that are experts in the area. Non-routine tasks are a cause of many injuries simple because the people involved are not familiar with the job and supervisors lack knowledge and experience (and time) to train people for the task.

Each superintendent should carefully analyze the job and determine the feasibility of in-house execution. If it proves to be unfeasible, make a strong recommendation that the job be contracted out. Usually, explaining the liabilities and expense will be sufficient to tip the scales in favor of the contractor.

Employees often resist the implemen-

The regulatory agencies state specifically that you may have a greater degree of safety regulation and stricter rules than the agencies' guidelines.

tation of a strong safety program. They view the use of some of the safety equipment as an encumbrance and discomfort. Many will argue that restricted vision, movement, or heat retention will create a safety problem rather than alleviate one. These objections must be handled diplomatically.

The old standard, “Because I said so,” or “I’ll fire you!,” just won’t work with today’s workers. Careful explanation of the concerns for individual safety and health held by the management very of



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Note the respirators on bench, ready for use.

ten remove the objections. Some employees will retain a bad attitude and continue to resist.

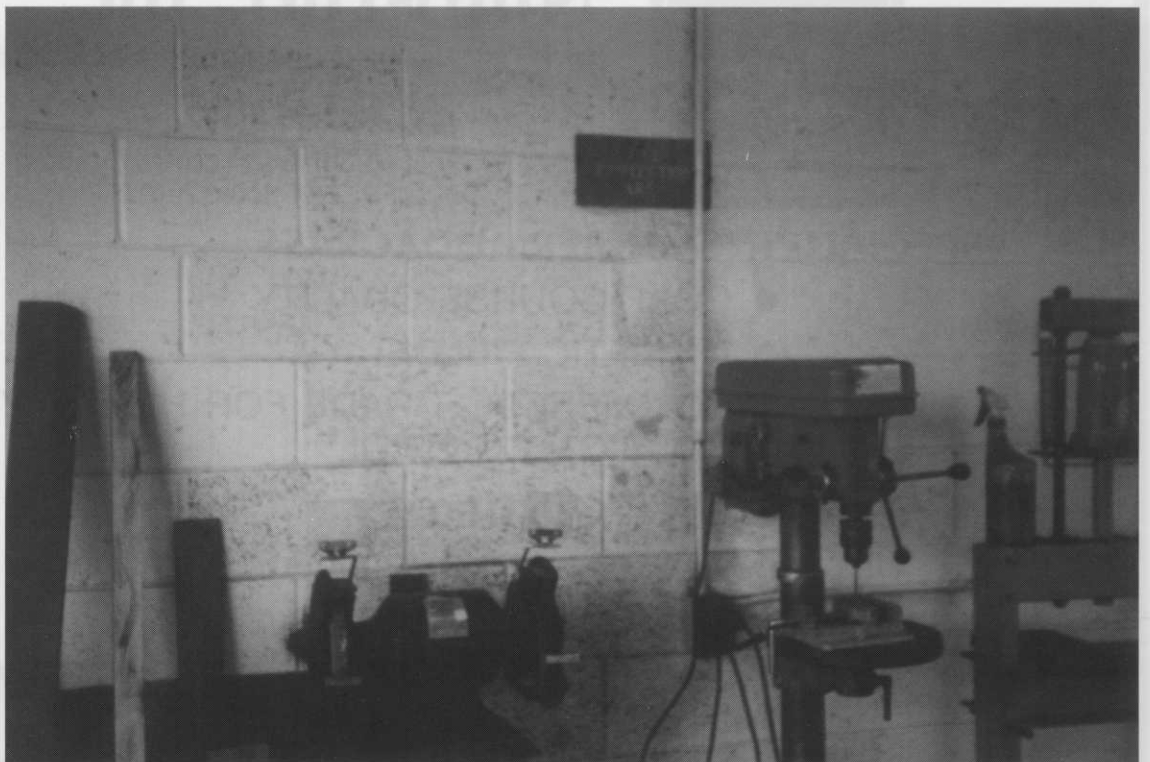
This is not all bad. People with this type of attitude are often disruptive to the efficiency and productivity of a department but they will single themselves out with their attitudes and be easier to iden-

tify and deal with. Remember, the regulatory agencies state specifically that you may have a greater degree of safety regulation and stricter rules than the agencies' guidelines. They also tell you and the employee that compliance with these policies set forth by the employer carry the weight of the law.

Regular meetings are conducted in the golf course maintenance department at this club.

Employees are encouraged to be creative and imaginative in all areas of the operation. When discussing safety issues, some employees will have constructive suggestions that really make a difference.

Machinery requiring eye protection is grouped and posted. The sign should probably be cleaned.



'How can any of you possibly object to something that is for your own good. The man is telling you that he doesn't want you to get hurt!'

One employee recently made a perspicuous observation. "How can any of you (fellow employees) possibly object to something that is for your own good. The man is telling you that he doesn't want you to get hurt!"

Following that comment, a moment of silence prevailed. When I continued with the meeting, I closed the safety segment saying, "I can't think of anything to say that would better illustrate the objec-

tives of our safety program than what you have just heard."

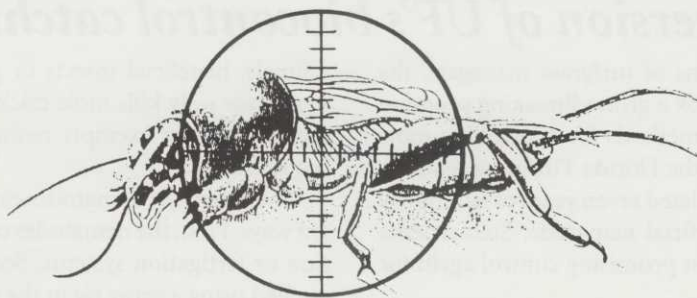
Getting started requires nothing more than setting a date for the first meeting and doing it.

A basic agenda of four or five items will generate enough discussion to fuel conversation for a half hour. Employees should be encouraged to voice their concerns and superintendents should follow up with management to assure that em-

ployees' concerns are adequately communicated. Some companies reward employees for reporting unsafe conditions or dangerous machinery.

Remember, the objective of a safety program is to prevent injury to employees. Pursuit of this objective will result in fewer accidents, less time loss due to injuries, lower workers' compensation premiums and, ultimately, a better overall operation.

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