OSHA targets ergonomics controls on industry

By MARK LESLIE

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Arguing that ergonomics is the solution, not the problem, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) ergonomics coordinator defended the agency's work to define guidelines for the workplace.

"Our Congressional mandate is to prevent injury and illness in the workplace," said Nancy Adams. "The way the debate gets framed, ergonomics is the problem. But it's not. It's an intervention strategy to prevent the injury from happening, by good engineering, good process design, fitting the job to the worker and not the worker to the job. You can't do that as one-size-fits-all."

OSHA's push into the realm of ergonomics is not new. The first ergonomist joined the agency in 1979, and talks with labor, trade associations and professional organizations began in the early 1980s. But the business and industry communities got concerned when, in 1992, an "Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking" targeted such items as:
- Lifting or carrying anything weighing 25 pounds without assistance more than once during a workshift.
- Using vibrating tools, which would include weed-eaters, for more than two hours.
- Working in awkward positions (such as kneeling, stooping or squatting) for more than two hours.
- Performing the same motions every few seconds.

"That's called labor," quipped one superintendent regarding the 25-pound limit. "The standard weight [for bags for various products] is 50 and 80 pounds."

Various other chores on a golf course maintenance crew

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Fathers of Invention

Carpet-wall bunkers expected trend-setter

By MARK LESLIE

SCITUATE, Mass. — Some inventions seem to be just laying around under a bush waiting to be discovered by an innovative mind. Such was the case of the "sodwall bunker kit in waiting" — Dr. Michael Hurdzan's answer to standard, old-time stackwall bunker. Fresh from a trip to Scotland, the home of sod-wall bunkers, Hurdzan was walking the property of what would become

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Ground, surface water: Minimal impact

By MARK LESLIE

TORONTO — News flash: Folk remedy strikes at the heart of the pond algae problem. While science and technology are striving to remove algae from ponds, some superintendents are accomplishing the task with a simple bale of barley straw.

A bale of barley straw floats atop a one-acre pond at Toronto's Board of Trade Country Club. No, this is not sod, which needs repair every couple of years. It's shag rug.

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Dicamba, 2,4-D no problem on greens

By MARK LESLIE

BELLE GLADE, Fla. — A two-year study of a U.S. Golf Association-specified golf green by University of Florida Profs. George Snyder and John Cisar has found that concentrations of the herbicides 2,4-D and dicamba were low in the thatch and soil and far below federal maximum contami-

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Notable quotables

"If we want perfect we can just stay at home and put on a rug." — Judy Bell, president, USGA CC of the Rockies

"You've got to use common sense out there. It's like working in a fish bowl. People see what you're doing. Three or four kids edging a bunker is not acceptable."

— Bob Feindt, superintendent, retiring from CC of Rochester

"We tried in the '40s, saying spikes were terrible on the turf, and that did nothing. No, the impetus for going 'spikesless' is the golfers. It has nothing to do with research, or the USGA ... or anything else."

— Jim Snow, USGA Green Section director
TO 'TREE' OR NOT TO 'TREE:' THAT IS THE QUESTION

- 'I can talk to a green chairman and say, 'Your job is not on the line here; the superintendent's is. Next time you drive by a sod farm, count the trees and look at the quality of the grass. Do you want the Oconomowoc Arboretum or Oconomowoc Golf Club.'
  — Craig Shreiner, course architect

- 'You all like trees. But I'll tell you, the game of golf is played from blade to blade, not from limb to limb.'
  — Bob Brame, USGA Green Section

Ergonomics

Continued from page 13 could be affected by proposed new regulations.

But Adams said, "Old draft proposals are not relevant. "Clearly the information we collected, in terms of baseline data for exposures and that sort of thing ... will all be used as we move forward to try to figure out how to address the issue from a regulatory perspective. But the approach we will take hasn't been determined yet."

Adams said OSHA will conduct a series of conferences with "stakeholders" around the country to gather their input and concerns on effective practices of ergonomics. The next will be held Sept. 23 outside Buffalo, N.Y. The specifics will be announced from OSHA's 10 regional headquarters and through its site on the OSHA web page: http://www.osha.gov.

The first session, in January, drew more than 1,000 people.

"The clear running thread of everything presented," Adams recalled, "was that OSHA should proceed with a programmatic approach."

Adams defined "programmatic" as having a program that contains "top-management commitment to deal with the issue; employee involvement in the cost-effective solutions to problems they have; training and education; job analysis; and some type of intervention, whether it's engineering controls, rotation, job modification, tools, etc., and medical management."

"If they have a process in which all these things are dealt with, they're addressing ergonomics from a programmatic standpoint. It's not any one thing, but a process."

Asked whether new regulations might include such parameters as the 25-pound limit of 1992, Adams said: "I don't know that in the foreseeable short term we will have enough information to pick specific triggers like that. We may be able to say that there is a range of triggers.

"The issue can get so skewed when people get down to an individual's capacities to do a specific job. Maybe in our lifetime there will be science or technologies to allow us to say you can do this amount or that amount, but we're not there. Until then, there need to be boundaries. Those boundaries need to be flexible enough, in terms of industries and operations, to allow the process to continue. But they also need to be defined enough so that we try to limit the number of people who get hurt."

Adams thought those in the golf industry should look upon ergonomics as a cost- and manhour-saving issue.

"Folks who have successfully dealt with this," she said, "lowered their compensation rates, lowered their injury and illness rates, and lowered the severity of the injuries when they indeed still had some injuries."

Most important, she said, is that "this is not a one-time process. Dealing with ergonomics is never-ending. The easily recognizable things you fix quickly. Other things you don't see right away. With others, you might fix one thing and unwittingly create another; or you trade one stress for another one."

"Some liken it to the song 'Hotel California.' You can check out, but you can never leave. But it's clear the investment up front, while it seems cost-intensive, in the long term pays and pays and pays for itself."

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