

Nothing can train you for this

Editor's note: As former president of the Ledgewood Association, a homeowners' association in Strongsville, OH, I oversaw the landscape operations for the association. The following story recounts a chilling event one of our crew members experienced.

Safety is no accident, the pundits say. Common wisdom holds that luck favors the prepared. A recent experience with our grounds crew seems to say that safety is often a combination of both luck and accident.

It was random chance that our second-oldest crew member, Dave, was out mowing a stretch between the lane and a creek with our 54-inch self-propelled walk-behind. It's a job we usually assign to junior members.

The grass he was mowing is about three feet above the stream. We had maintained and mowed it for years. Earlier in the week, there had been some soaking rains, but nothing overly unusual for the season. Suddenly, the ground gave way under him. As he tells it, there was no time to react — he simply shoved the mower away from himself and jumped away from the mower and into the creek. A ten-foot chunk of the stream bank slumped and rolled into the water, taking the mower with it.

Here's where it gets strange. He mustn't have let go quite as quickly as he recalls, for the mower turned over and landed upside-down in the creek, still running. The mower is equipped with the standard positive on, quick-release shut-off handles. They were in working order. Yet, when the mower came to rest upside-down in the creek, the handles were jammed into the bed of the creek, locking the unit into the on position. The mower kept running.

Dave was sharp enough to draw in a deep breath or two before taking action. He gingerly reached over and hit the kill switch on the motor. Then he climbed up the stream bank, walked back to the garage and called it a day.

This is not the kind of accident that one trains for or designs equipment to handle. It was pure good luck that we had a senior person on the job and that he was thinking clearly and logically even after surviving the scare of the season.

This summer, we're planting creeping ivy and several other groundcovers all along the stream bank. Once bitten, twice shy.



Curt Harler
Managing Editor