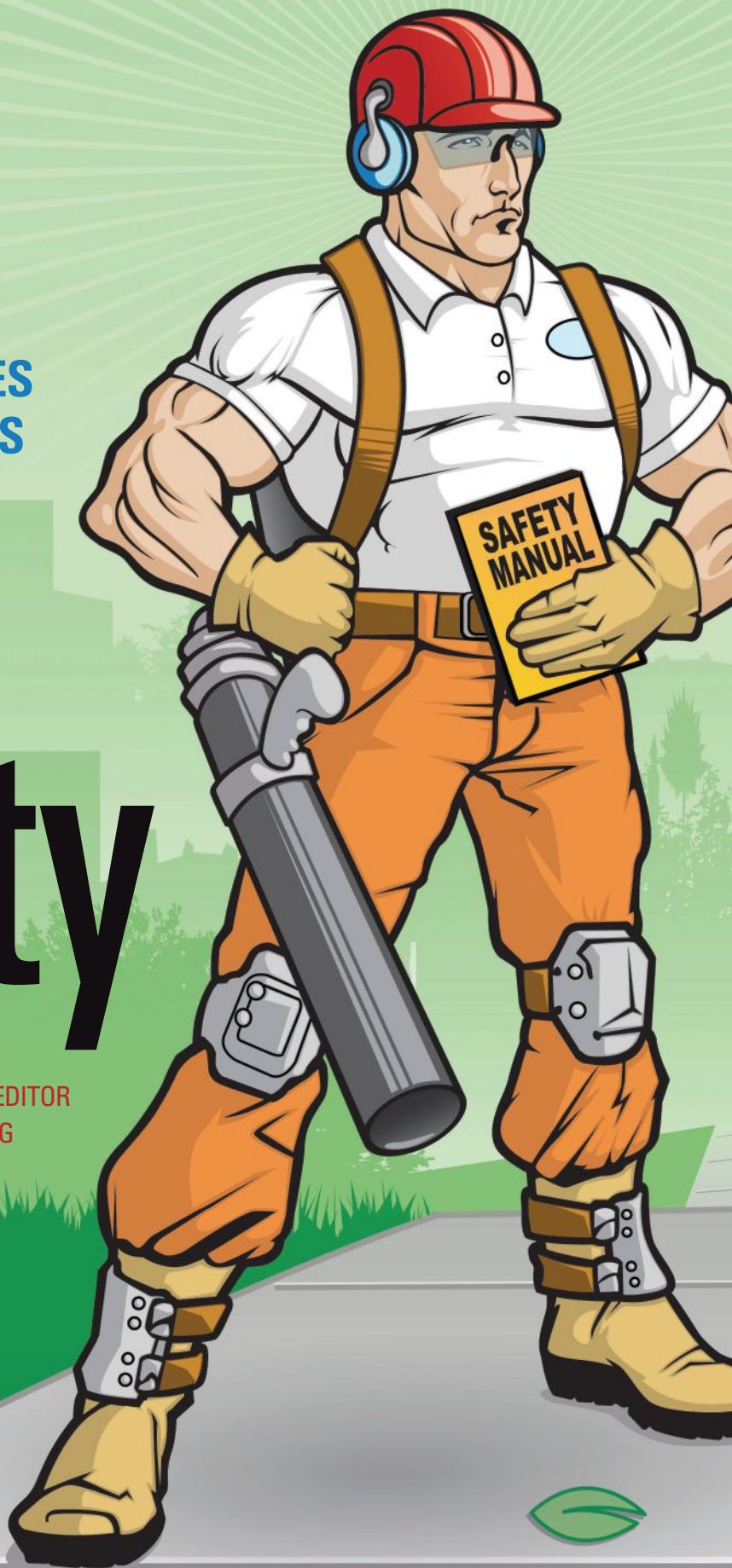


**TRAINING TURNS
EMPLOYEES INTO
CHAMPIONS,
WHICH DECREASES
INJURY, IMPROVES
PRODUCTIVITY
AND HELPS KEEP
COSTS IN LINE.**

Safety

STORY BY BETH GERACI, SENIOR EDITOR
ILLUSTRATIONS BY DAVID V. GRIGG





According to the South Florida Sun-Sentinel, a 38-year-old landscaper was weeding a lawn near a chain link fence at a middle school in Davie, FL, when he was struck by lightning. Dazed, the man was taken to an area hospital. He was one of the lucky ones; he survived. Some aren't so fortunate.

According to the most recent Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) statistics, 13 landscaping-related fatalities were caused by electrocution in 2009. And it's just one example of how dangerous landscaping can be.

Whether they're mowing, tree trimming or sawing wood, landscapers can never be too careful in the field. Problem is, when workers are on the job, they don't always contemplate that. On-the-job accidents happen for many reasons, business owners and consultants say, not the least of which are carelessness, ignorance and machismo.

For workers to work safely in the field, they need more than just thorough safety training. A quality company safety policy is meaningless without strict enforcement and continual worker oversight. » »


David Grigg

According to Texas' www.starlocalnews.com, a landscaper was mowing a lawn in McKinney, TX when his hand somehow touched the lawnmower blade. The blade was still active. The accident severed several of the landscaper's fingers and he was rushed to a local hospital.

Dangers of yard work

Such accidents are common in the landscape industry, as Eastern Land Management president Bruce Moore knows. The top injuries the company sees are cuts from mowers and back injuries due to heavy lifting, he says.

"We've seen guys putting their hands under a mower deck," Moore says. "You never know why some people do what they do. We had one guy trying to adjust the belts that drive the blades while the machine was running and he lost part of his finger with that."

David Estrada is AAA Landscape's

new safety director. He started on the job in June. A hands-on leader, Estrada spends 80% of his time in the field, making the rounds.

The company has a training room, where safety leaders show presentations on safety before taking new employees out in the field for hands-on training.

"If they can't operate the major equipment like weeders, chainsaws or blowers, they don't get hired," Estrada says. Presentations cover everything from fire extinguishers to scorpion protection, and the company even has a separate defensive driving program.

Vehicle accidents common

AAA has "zero tolerance of cell phone use while driving," Estrada says, "because we've had several vehicle accidents," including a recent incident in which an employee was talking on his cell phone, opened the door, hit it on a mailbox and smashed the window.

Moore's Eastern Land Management, Stamford, CT, recently was awarded an Overall Safety Achievement Award from the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). The award recognizes ELM's commitment to providing safe work environments for its workers.

ELM and other companies were evaluated on overall number of accidents, number of days that employees were away from work, and reported injuries and illnesses, as well as the quality of its safety programs.

Increased safety "is something we've worked hard on," Moore says. "I'm very proud of the award."

To improve driver safety, in January
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MAKING THE SAFETY GRADE IN MANUFACTURING

Randy Reinke is president of Custom Products, a manufacturer of cabs and rollbars based in Litchfield, MN. The company sells cabs and rollbars to vehicle manufacturers such as Toro and Bobcat and to landscape and tractor dealers.

Reinke's been building cabs since 1963 and rollover protection since 1971.

Custom Products operates a 130,000-square-foot facility featuring a test lab where the company tests its designs before certifying them.

"The safety really has to be pushed starting with the manufacturer," Reinke says. "Then it's important that the safety message comes all the way down — to the dealer, then the purchaser. It's important that the safety message comes all

the way down through the distribution channel."

Some employers may forget that it's actually an OSHA legal requirement to provide a safe workplace for employees.

"Why do you do it?" asks Reinke. "You want to avoid injury and you also want to avoid liability. The end goal is protecting that person — that human being at the end of the line. Safety saves lives."

Cary Zielinsky, president of Rider Tailgate Accessories, is a forest engineer who does timber work for the State of Utah.

He recently developed new truck accessories called Tailgate Cable Extension Links. The links make loading and unloading landscape equipment safer and easier, Zielinsky says, because they decrease a loading ramp's steepness.

"I had the idea quite a few years ago," he says. "I had an ATV, and the steep angle of the loading ramps on the tailgate wasn't good." As a result it was difficult to load heavy equipment, which often slid down the ramp, he explains.

The steel links can pull about 4,700 pounds.

"Anyone who has to load on ramps knows going backwards throws the weight a little bit," Zielinsky says. He adds that Rider links reduce ramp steepness by about 16% and allow a tailgate to be lowered past 90 degrees. As a result, low ground clearance equipment such as riding mowers do not get stuck on the tailgate edge.

"For me it was all about the safety," Zielinsky says. "If it's less steep, you're less likely to lose traction going up the ramps."

A mower is loaded into a pickup truck with the help of Tailgate Cable Extension Links. The links lower the tailgate by 5.3 inches.



PHOTO COURTESY: CARY ZIELINSKY

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ELM installed GPS units on all of its vehicles and receives a weekly report of the speed limit at which employees are traveling.

Because its trucks travel the highway daily, ELM sets the limit at 60 miles per hour. Every Friday, ELM receives a spreadsheet showing which vehicles exceeded 60 mph. Once a driver exceeds 65 mph he or she receives a written warning and repeat violators are fired after their third infraction.

OSHA statistics indicate that 20 landscape workers died in highway accidents in 2009; and Bureau of Labor Statistics 2010 preliminary data states transportation accidents in all industries declined from 2009-2010 yet still accounted for nearly two out of every five work-related deaths.

Like AAA, Green Lawn Fertilizing forbids its employees to use cell phones while driving, says Vice President of Operations Tom Knopsnyder. "You're driving a 9,000-pound vehicle on the road," he says. "We're driving through residential neighborhoods. We're aware of the risks. We take it very seriously."

Also, last July, Green Lawn began providing chains to restrain equipment in its trucks. The chains are installed by a mechanic before any truck goes out in the field.

"It's a 2,000-pound machine," says Knopsnyder. Obviously, you know what can happen if that machine falls off and hurts somebody."

Like ELM, Knopsnyder is proud to say that Green Lawn received a safety award from PLANET last year for having no road-related accidents. "We didn't hit a parked car or hit a mailbox off the side of the road," he says.

Heat a factor

At AAA, based in Phoenix, temperatures often rise to 118 degrees, so employees can become overheated.

According to OSHA preliminary statistics, more than 30 workers died in 2010 from heat-related illnesses. In June of this year, the administration launched a campaign to educate land-



Staying hydrated on hot days helps prevent injury and lost productivity.

"WE HAD A COUPLE NEW EMPLOYEES GET INJURED BECAUSE THEY WEREN'T USED TO WORKING IN THE SUN. THEY'RE NOT USED TO WORKING OUTSIDE IN 100 DEGREES FOR 8 HOURS, AND BY THE END OF THE DAY THEY GET CONFUSED AND DIZZY AND THAT'S WHEN WE HAVE ACCIDENTS."

— DAVID ESTRADA

AAA LANDSCAPE, SAFETY DIRECTOR

scapers about the risks of working in the heat. The campaign reminds workers that they need "water, rest and shade," according to OSHA's website.

AAA has a heat illness prevention plan showing employees how to recognize and treat heat stroke and heat exhaustion symptoms. When workers suffer a heat-related illness, they are required to do exactly what OSHA suggests — go to shade and loosen clothing. Their fellow workers are told to fan them and put an ice pack under their armpits and on their legs.

On each job site, AAA also provides an ice machine, water, electrolyte powder and salt tablets. If employees do not get better, they are driven home.

Chemical risks

Speaking of risks, Knopsnyder says working with chemicals and heavy equipment can be extremely dangerous, and that's why safety is among the company's top five priorities.

At Green Lawn, the guys doing the fertilizer applications have the most dangerous job. That's why Green Lawn provides them with rubber gloves, rubber boots, safety glasses and long-sleeved shirts. In the four years Knopsnyder's worked at Green Lawn, a worker's never suffered a chemical burn.

Because working with fertilizers can be dangerous, Green Lawn audits its workers and watches them apply chemicals in the field, showing them what they did right and what they did wrong.

"If it's a major violation they'll be terminated on the spot," says Knopsnyder.

Knopsnyder wishes more companies would take applying fertilizers seriously and train employees properly. More companies need to be well versed on rules and regulations, he says. But unfortunately, "if you have a truck and a spreader, you can start a lawncare company."

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COVER STORY

FATALITIES RESULTING FROM TREE-RELATED WORK ACCIDENTS IN 2009

Source: Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA)

22

The number of workers killed by a falling tree or tree limb

17

The number of workers who died after falling from a tree

14

The number of workers who died from electric shock

9

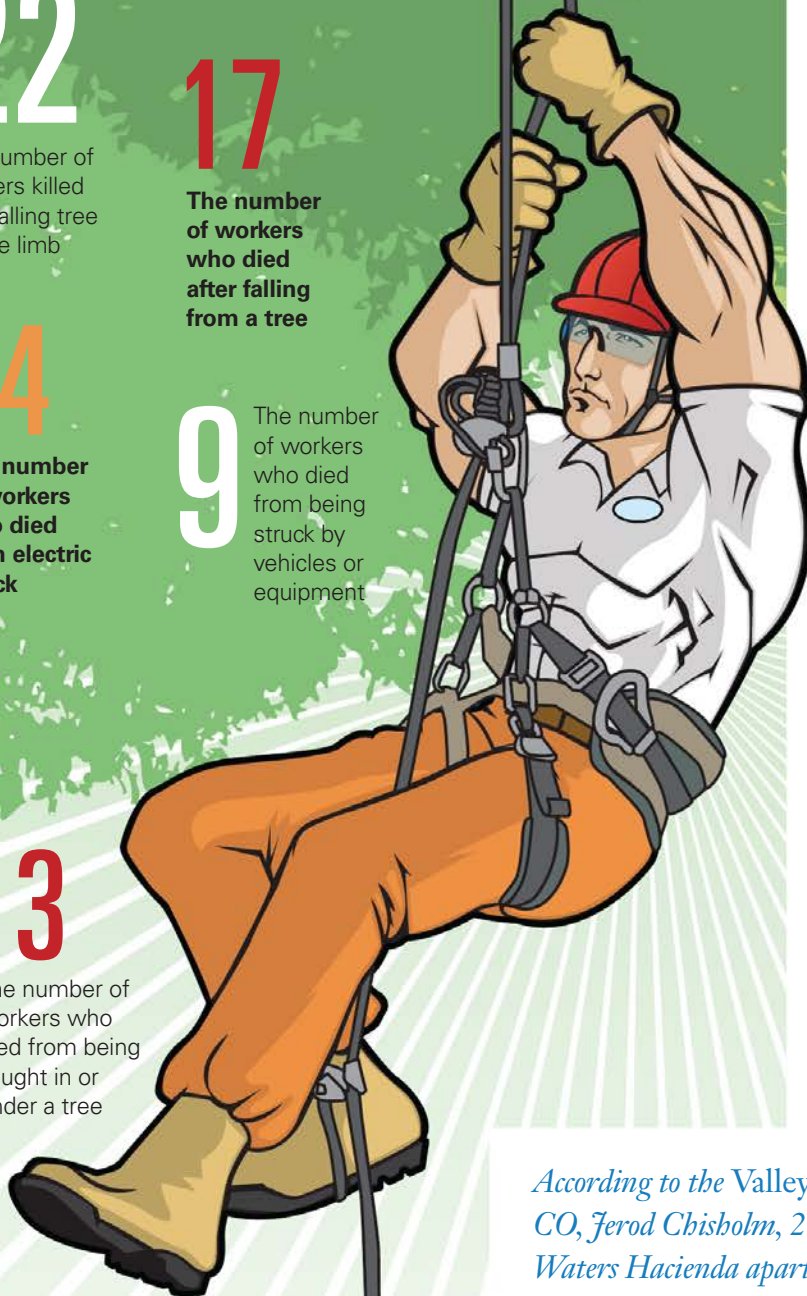
The number of workers who died from being struck by vehicles or equipment

3

The number of workers who died from being caught in or under a tree

2

The number of workers who died from being caught in a chipper



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Tree care a risky profession

The young man was discovered unconscious in his trimming unit's bucket (see anecdote below). Paramedics performed CPR on Chisolm for more than half an hour before he was pronounced dead, the paper reported.

Tree care is routinely listed among the top five most dangerous professions in the world. Preliminary 2010 Bureau of Labor statistics show that fatal work injuries involving forestry, farming and fishing rose by 9% in 2010, while fatalities among logging workers specifically also increased, from 36 in 2009 to 59.

Ninety percent of all accidents can be attributed to unsafe behaviors, asserts Peter Gerstenberger, senior adviser for safety compliance and standards at the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA).

Gerstenberger runs a certified tree care safety program at TCIA, an association for commercial tree care companies that strives to reduce accidents and improve worker safety.

Dangers usually emerge when tree care veterans — not new workers — become overconfident, Gerstenberger says.

Dave Marren, vice president of safety and regulatory affairs for Bartlett Tree Experts, agrees.

"Workers must remember that you can do something right 99.9% of the time and that .1%, that one day at 11 o'clock in the morning on that oak tree, you can make a mistake and get hurt."

According to the Valley Courier newspaper in Alamosa, CO, Jerod Chisolm, 25, was trimming trees at the Blue Waters Hacienda apartment complex in Saguache County, CO. Everything was going great, that is until the arm of his tree-trimming device touched an electrical line, the paper reported.



Workers operate a wood chipper.

At Bartlett, if an employee commits the same infraction twice he or she is fired. Some infractions, such as not being tied in when working above ground, are one strike and you're out. "We're not playing baseball," Marren says.

Training key to preventing accidents

Marren oversees all of Bartlett's safety and compliance programs, and Bartlett's is among the most intensive safety training programs in the industry. It operates a state-of-the-art, 400-acre facility dedicated solely to safety. Workers attend 50- to 60-hour safety courses covering everything from rigging to cabling.

"We go out and actually apply techniques with seasoned instructors and look at the pros and cons of each type of system," Marren says. "It's more than, 'OK, we've told you the right way to do it. You're on your own.' You have to make it part of their behavior."

"It's like learning how to drive," adds Dane Buell, director of general tree care at SavATree. "You're more careful when you're first starting out."

Inspired to modify SavATree's safety policy after attending a tree conference last winter, Buell says SavATree is now revising its safety policy, focusing more on injury prevention.

It already holds a monthly safety-related conference call, where its safety committee discusses accidents, near misses and how they can be prevented going forward.

The TCIA compiles information on all arbor-related accidents reported in the media. The association's most recent data show that in 2009, 89 fatalities were reported.

Of those deaths, 22 workers were struck by a tree or tree limb when removing trees; 17 fell from trees; 14 died from electric shock; 9 were struck by vehicles or equipment; and the remainder were incited by various other causes, such as chipper accidents and asphyxiation.

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COVER STORY

companies aren't always aware of hazards or don't have the resources to address them, Gerstenberger says, and workers often have accidents because they have no training.

He should know; he worked in tree care for 10 years. "In a sense I am a poster child for what I'm talking about," he says. During those 10 years,

he suffered minor injuries, which happened because his company didn't provide safety training.

Hefty price to pay for injuries

When Moore recalls the mowing accident in which his employee lost part of his finger, he bristles when he thinks of the cost, not only to the man

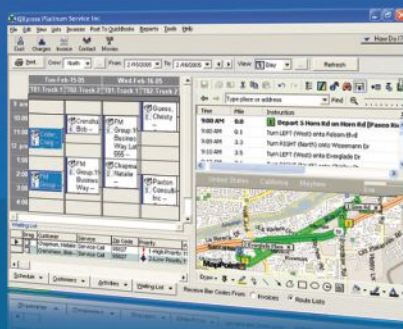
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RATES IS TO REDUCE
YOUR LOSSES."**

—DANE BUELL
DIRECTOR OF GENERAL TREE CARE,
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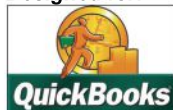
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but also to the company.

"It's unfortunate, but at the same time workers don't understand that it costs the company a lot of money, because as your insurance claims rise, your premiums go up." And when rates rise, they stay that way for three years, he says.

The last major claim ELM had was 15 years ago, Moore says. An employee who was pruning fell off a ladder, twisted his knee and needed two surgeries.

"It was well over \$150,000 that the insurance company paid," Moore says. "Our rates went up 15% just from that one accident. In today's market you could lose your insurance altogether."

Simple accidents, even an emergency room visit, can cost a company several thousand dollars, Moore adds.

It's crucial to have a hefty insurance plan, as Green Lawn does, says Knopsnyder. "If you're not insured, it's just a bad accident waiting to happen and it's bad for everybody in the business.

"When a company doesn't follow the rules we all get lumped into that. It's not good."

Insurance "is a big deal," says SavA-Tree's Buell, "but the trick to having competitive insurance rates is to reduce your losses. It's like the stock market. You buy low and sell high."

Hearing stories like those of a 32-year-old weed-whacker who got too close to the street and was killed by a car in a hit-and-run accident always hits home, Gerstenberger says.

Such stories are stark reminders that no worker is immune to tragedy.

"The majority of the accidents happen to people who have been on the job for years," Estrada says. "They feel like they can do it with their eyes closed, and they can't." LM