

## Safety First!

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By now, even if you haven't lived in Chicago for years, you've probably realized that spring is right around the corner. With the warm days of spring comes birds, squirrels, green grass, golfers and grounds maintenance. As we climb out of our winter hibernation and start to hire new employees, the hustle and bustle in our shops starts to increase. New employees rifle through the mechanic's tool box looking for a ½-inch box wrench. Old employees leave their tools where they always do, in the wrong place. You and your winter staff are used to each other and your routines are now being disrupted after a long winter of doing everything the same way.

All these things add up to one thing: An accident just waiting to happen.

Now I know what you're thinking — "My mechanic has been with me for sixteen years. Those shovels have been hanging on the same nail since Eisenhower (the president, not the expressway). We have been working the same way for years without any problems, safety is for guys with new employees, new shops, new equipment," or any other reason to justify filing your shop safety program at the back of the desk drawer.

Well, let me pass on a small incident that recently happened in a well-established shop. This particular mechanic is a professional who has been working on equipment in some capacity for over thirty years. It seems the springs on the snow plow needed changing. As he's done for years, the mechanic blocked the blade, loosened the bolts and compressed and removed the springs. He then put the new springs on, bolted one end down and used pry bars to flex the springs into position to bolt

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them to the plow. As he put the bolt in, he first reached over the plow and stuck his little finger in the hole to make sure the holes were lined up correctly. What happened next is still up for discussion — either the pry bar slipped or he bumped it, but the results were the same when the spring snapped back ...

Now this guy has done springs this way for years. There were never any problems before. He is considered a very safe mechanic in his shop, follows the posted rules, etc. But no amount of medical magic will give him back the last knuckle of his little finger.

So, how does this effect us every day in our shops? The truth is we can never make this world one of rounded corners and safety shields. We do dangerous work at times and accidents can happen. What we can do is not let our guard down. It is our job to make sure our employees work safely. It is also our responsibility to assist them in thinking smarter while they work.

The best thing we can do is to lead by example. But there are many other programs we can bring on board to help. Monthly safety meetings over lunch or breaks keep this information fresh. A simple daily tally of days worked safely reminds your employees of a job well-done. A safety audit done by a different employee every month will give you a fresh look at the shop you work in every day; the audit will probably pick up things you might miss. Also, if you have Spanish employees, are your safety signs bi-lingual? Some shops even have a small budget for a cash or gift certificate awarded monthly to employees for practicing safety on the job.

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