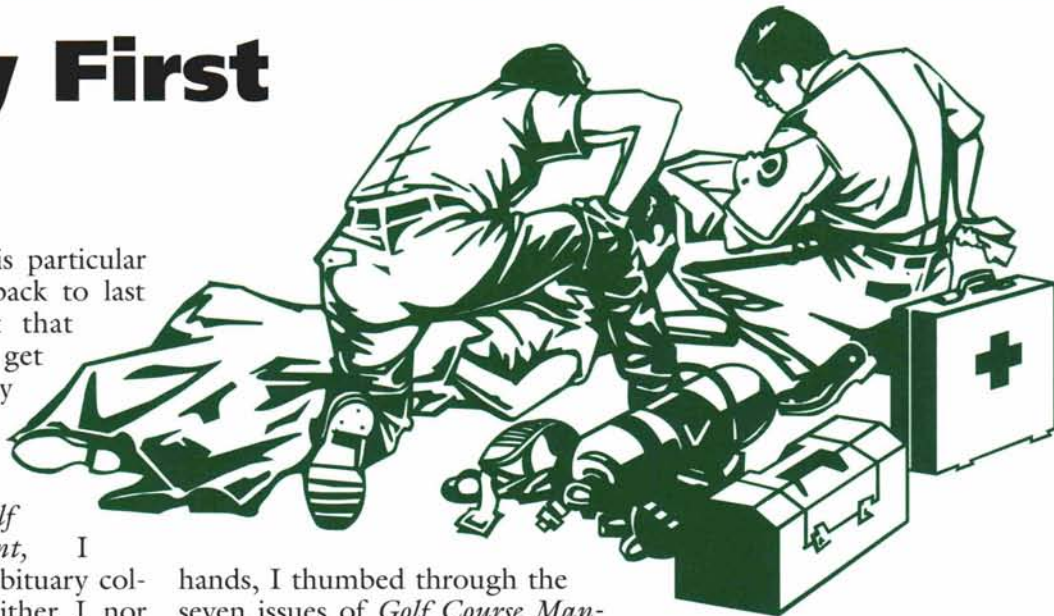


# Safety First

Brian Bossert  
Bryn Mawr C.C.

The idea for this particular column goes back to last December. At that time of year, I actually get a chance to read my monthly trade publications, and as I was thumbing through the latest issue of *Golf Course Management*, I noticed a pretty full obituary column. Fortunately, neither I nor any of my acquaintances were listed. There were, however, ten, and I was further struck by the fact that two of these gentlemen were in their forties. I wondered if this was bizarre or the norm. So, and remember it was December, since I had a couple minutes on my



hands, I thumbed through the seven issues of *Golf Course Management* from 1997 that I could locate in my soon-to-be-cleaned office and did a very unscientific study. Of the 29 obituaries listed in those seven magazines, the average age of death was 67, and 6 of the 29 had passed on prior to turning 50.

Now, I obviously don't know the facts surrounding these deaths. Let's hope the deaths were in no way related to their occupation. However, I did use the information to remind myself that

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## Safety First

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this can be an unsafe occupation if we let it be. As the season warms up, we may want to make sure we've taken extra time to adequately train and warn our employees of the potential hazards of working on a golf course. In the event of an unfortunate accident, are employees aware of what to do? Have we updated our employees' emergency contact information?

Safety is an important and often overlooked issue in the workplace. The following superintendents, including myself, have provided this insight: Brian Green at Sunset Valley Golf Club and his staff are part of a dedicated program that involves an immense amount of training. At least one-half day per month is set aside for safety training, and that total is one-half of a day per week in the spring. These sessions cover topics such as chainsaw safety, ladder safety and respirator use. Their park district employs a part-time safety supervisor to assist him in meeting their needs. Additionally, each employee goes through an orientation checklist of roughly 30 items that includes video and hands-on training prior to starting work each season. All full-time employees are certified to administer CPR.

Brian also credits their work with the Park District Risk Management Agency (PDRMA) in their obtaining the highest safety rating available for a park district. Brian really feels like their commitment to the stringent training relieves him of possible burden in the event there is an accident. He also informed me that the highest incidence of damage to property occurs when a vehicle is backing up. That everyday task might be worth a mention during your next chat with the staff.

While attending the annual Chicagoland shop tour a few years back, I was very impressed with the tidy surroundings at Lake Bluff Golf Club. You could tell their commitment to cleanliness went a little further than just that particular day. Do you remember all those "Wear your hard hat signs"? Jerry Mach told me he took a very serious stance on cleanliness several years back after slipping on a greasy floor. His common sense approach includes persistent reminders to the crew regarding cleanliness and hard hat usage.

I also talked to Rick Bowden at Bob O'link Golf Club. A few years back, they asked the OSHA consultation service to do a safety audit of their operation. The service (which is free of charge), in turn, gives you several specific recommendations that you agree to do, usually within a six- to eight-week period. Examples of these recommendations include things

like explosion-proof lighting in the paint room and proper tongue guards on the grinding wheels. You can contact this service at 312-814-2337. Rick also said they have annually committed roughly \$1,500 for the past couple years to improve their containment for items such as paint, paint thinner and aerosols.

Unfortunately, Rick had to put some of their safety training into action recently. A long-time seasonal employee suffered a heart attack his first day back this season. At press time, his prognosis was not good. Do you have anyone on your staff prepared to administer CPR?

Last winter, after six seasons at Bryn Mawr, I finally got around to developing a department manual. I go through it, item by item, with new employees. An Hispanic employee translates when neces-

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## Safety First

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sary, and each employee signs off stating they understand the manual. We go through the manual as a group with the returning seasonal employees each spring. We also used the previously mentioned OSHA service which was very helpful and much less painful than I figured it to be.

In 1997, we also started a "safety awareness" program designed to reduce work-related accidents. During my first six seasons, we had averaged four accidents a year that required medical attention. Most of these were very minor, and a trip to the clinic was mainly precautionary for a scratch on the face while mowing under a tree or a sore something resulting from an early morning tumble on wet grass. However, there was also a nasty errant golf ball across the

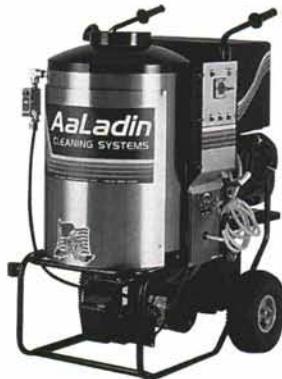
bridge of the nose incident and the unthinkable mower blade vs. finger accident in which the mower always wins. Through weekly meetings and additional training (some videos), we had hoped to reduce the number of accidents from four down to two or less. Fortunately, we had only one claim in 1997. Everyone was rewarded with an afternoon off with pay and some club logo T-shirts.

In another program, we awarded a gift to an employee who had no "safety strikes" against him in a given month. Examples of "safety strikes" would include driving a cart with your foot hanging out, failure to wear a hard hat or safety glasses when required or unsafe operation of equipment. At the beginning of the month, everyone would be eligible for the drawing. If you were issued a "safety strike" you were

not eligible for the drawing at the end of the month in which one person would be awarded a gift. Gifts ranged from shirts to Cub tickets, most of them freebies that I came across throughout the summer. "Safety strikes" were tallied on the bulletin board, and, consequently, good-natured ribbing resulted from a "strike." This program added enthusiasm to our commitment to safety and cost next to nothing to get started. And, most importantly, it was very effective. Hopefully, before the season gets into high gear, you can use the preceding information to help you evaluate your operation and make the often simple changes needed for it to become safer for your employees. ■

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