

It's simply called...

'Good Management'

BY GARY T. GRIGG, CGCS

Whether you are an experienced superintendent of a golf course, a new superintendent, or about to move up as a golf course superintendent, you are a manager. You need to think and act like a manager.

As an agronomic-trained golf course superintendent, you have acquired many specific technological skills. As a manager, you now need to rely less and less on your own skills and move into managing areas that are more intangible. Some of those areas are time, budget, planning and people. The largest area that will confront you is working with people. As a manager, you will now relate to people in new ways.

Dealing with people consists of two major areas — dealing with your crew and interacting with people in other departments at your club.

For most of us, myself included, we come through the ranks feeling our principal asset is our technical ability. As we move up, we find it takes more than that to be successful in this business. All at once, as the manager, it is your ability to get things done through other people that counts most. Your crew becomes by far your most important asset and you must get work done through them.

Management of your staff is not taught in turf school — it is acquired from experience. Most of what I have learned, I learned by making mistakes. Believe me, some of my mistakes have been big ones. I survived because basically I like people and it helps a lot to like people. If your crew knows you like them and you show concern for them, they will get a lot of work done for you.

Interacting with people in other departments is nothing more than good communication. The other department

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heads at the club are also professionals and they are important for the accomplishment of both your short-term and long-term goals. You are part of a business and you need to think about the implications of your work and how it affects the other departments of the club. You cannot become too stressed nor be too casual while interacting with the other professional staff at the club.

Good communication cannot be over-emphasized. Mix-ups in communication can be embarrassing for everyone. In my experience, most errors on the golf course are caused by improper communication. Most superintendents who lose their jobs do so not because of lack of technical skills but because they failed to communicate properly. The responsibility for good communication belongs to the person who wants to communicate. Usually that is the manager. It is always your responsibility to instruct your staff properly.

Keep in mind that everyone's goal is satisfaction of the member or customer. Remember that ultimately the member or customer influences your job and your salary.

As a manager, your responsibilities are much greater. Some superintendents become overwhelmed by trying to bud-

get time. The key for me is to prioritize. Make a list each day and note what must be done first, and so on down. Those things that can wait should also be identified. Several years ago, I started using a day planner. I find it very helpful keeping track of projects and sequential tasking.

Budgeting and management of your budget is a process of achieving your goals by using funds prudently. In my budget process, I give the club more than a typical spreadsheet. A high quality budget should include:

1. An organizational chart of your department.
2. A staffing chart complete with job descriptions.
3. A description of each category item in your budget.
4. A spreadsheet with category items down the left axis and months across the top. A lot of superintendents stop here.
5. A complete management plan for the golf course. This plan should detail how the golf course is to be maintained. Hopefully, you can equate budget numbers to this plan. For example:

Under the chemical insecticide use portion of the plan, detail the chemicals to be used and the cost of each program.

Nematodes, mole cricket, fire ant, cutworms, sod webworm, chinch bug, etc. Each program should be detailed with cost.

Under fertilization, detail each fertilizer program with type of fertilizer and cost. Green, tee, fairway and rough programs should be detailed.

Carry this on for each category item in the budget, including the shop.

The value of this plan is that when your budget is being reviewed by those who approve it, they fully understand that when cutting money from the budget, they are cutting programs. If someone says to you, for example: "Cut your chemical cost." You lay out your management plan and reply, "Which program do you want to eliminate?" Management will find it more difficult to eliminate needed programs than simply to amend a dollar figure. In the process of budget review, you will be seen as an able manager of the club's money.

Everyone should have heard of the

five p's — prior planning prevents poor performance. There are a lot of steps involved in planning depending on the text book you are reading. In my opinion, only four are major:

- Where do you want to go?
- What does it take to get there?
- Implement the decision.
- Monitor the plan for feedback as you go.

Remember, details change as you go and you might have to adapt. The key word is flexibility. If you know where you want to go and a shift occurs along the way, just keep the original goal in mind and you will still achieve it.

As manager, all these intangibles interact. For example: You plan several projects and for budget reasons or time constraints, you may be forced to choose between the projects.

You think like a manager and make an informed decision.

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In English or in Spanish, managers must...

Communicate carefully

BY SCOTT WAHLIN

One afternoon while sitting at my desk, I had an employee storm into my office waving a machete screaming, "I kill him! I kill him!" I said, "Wait a minute. Have you already killed him or are you going to kill him?"

Communicating with non-English speaking people can be challenging and create some tense moments. I would like to explore some strategies and philosophies when dealing with people I cannot talk to efficiently. Many of the points I will try to make here could relate just as easily to supervisory situations where all parties speak the same language. I feel confident with this statement because, as a supervisor, people who speak English frequently hear something other than what I said. My communication with them would probably have been enhanced had I assumed that they did not understand what I said.

"Tell me — I'll forget. Show me — I might remember. Involve me — I'll understand."

I am not sure where I heard this but I like it and use it.

A feeling of being in on things always seems to rate high on surveys of people who are asked what they like about their jobs. It is important to let your team know what you are planning, what projects will be implemented, and why, and to give them a clear explanation of why they are doing what they are doing.

A few years ago while training a non-English speaking employee to fertilize greens, I included an explanation of each of the various particles in the mix and what they did. I watched him do two greens then let him work on his own for a half hour. When I returned, he had several opened bags set aside. When I asked him about this, he reached into the bag and showed me a particle that he could not identify. It was muriate of potash and would have caused damage the way we were applying it.

I never expected to have a problem with this mix. I had explained the particles only because I thought it would motivate him to do a better job.

Everyone wants to be associated with ex-

Tell me - I'll forget. Show me - I might remember. Involve me - I'll understand.

cellence. Some may have given up; others are pursuing excellence in other areas of their lives with such vigor that they do not have time for you. Most people can be appealed to on this level.

I read a story one time about a company president who attended a softball game involving many of his employees. He was shocked to find energy and enthusiasm in several people whom he had thought to be very subdued. For some reason, this enthusiasm was not evident in their work.

Our job as supervisors is to find out what motivates individual employees to pursue their duties with energetic enthusiasm. Certainly there are many possibilities but one that seems to work well with many non-English speaking people is an opportunity to learn and advance. Technical training in irrigation repair and maintenance, equipment maintenance or materials application can be an excellent place to start.

Offering to pay for English classes or even having them on the property can be helpful. I have seen this work at many clubs where the result was a core of stable, highly motivated team players who accepted personal ownership of their areas of responsibility. An added bonus is that newcomers and other crew members quickly realize that their fate and compensation is based on their performance and desire to get ahead.

I was interviewed one time by a man who was telling me about the crew at the



club he represented. He said that his club did not have any of "those Murielito-types" working there. I had had considerable success with new hires that had come to the U.S. via the boatlift and told this man that I would not be limited in my choice of candidates to work on the golf course.

It was my impression that this man did not like Hispanics.

When I went to his club for a subsequent interview and heard him speaking Spanish, I asked him if he learned to speak Spanish because he lives in South Florida. He said, "No, I'm Cuban."

I got the job. I am sure it would be better if I learned more Spanish but I really have not had the need. I write instructions on the bulletin board in English and somehow they are carried out. Others will translate what is written and even follow up to make sure the activity is going well. I hand out forms and other

items that need to be filled out by the employees and give them the option of taking them home. They do and bring them back filled out properly.

I have had a couple situations with governmental agencies that having non-English speaking employees has aggravated.

I fired one employee for misconduct after several oral and written warnings. He applied for unemployment compensation and got it. I appealed and got a hearing. At the hearing the lady in charge asked me how I communicated my concerns to the employee. I told her I used a translator. She asked me how I knew that the translator told the employee what I wanted. I asked her to ask the employee what the translator had said. The employee said the same thing I said. I still lost because at the time I could not have been sure what the translator was saying.

As an FTGA member, I should have

called Seay and Associates!

The other concern I have relates to HAZCOM training. My understanding is that inspectors will judge your compliance based on your employee's understanding of the program, not on our ability to keep records of meetings. Will the inspector be willing to conduct interviews in Spanish or trust a translator?

The Lord has seen fit to challenge us with an imperfect world. Just like most of these imperfect situations, there are good and bad aspects that are not apparent on the surface. I find living in an international city very exciting. (I don't have to look very hard to see my blond kids in a sea of soccer players.)

I have learned that although people are very different, they are very much the same. One thing though is for sure: Anyone willing to get in a boat and row ninety miles across the ocean to get here can work for me.

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SAFETY FIRST

...and last, and always

BY PRENTISS C. KNOTTS

Golf Course Superintendent

Eagle Creek County Club, Naples

While directing the golf course operations at a facility that I won't name, I observed (from a distance) a spray technician "formulating" a concoction to apply to the turf. I was unfamiliar with the specific technique he was using and approached for a more detailed examination of the procedure. The technician was preparing a mixture of insecticide to control several insect pests.

The material was in a soluble powder form and was being shaken directly into the tank. The insecticide was floating in the air and a large amount had become attached to the technician. In fact, his appearance was not unlike a honeybee that had been furiously working in flowers all day. His eyebrows were thick with the stuff and even the hairs in his nostrils were coated. I was so excited at what I was seeing that I just had to learn more.

"You're the spray tech?," I asked. "Yep!," he answered. "Been doing this a while, have you?," I continued. "Oh, four...no, five years," he responded. "I took over from Old Charlie," he volunteered. "Old Charlie (I write it this way because that's exactly the way it sounded, that is, 'Old' was his first name and 'Charlie,' his last) taught me everythin' I know. He was the head spray man around here for maybe 15 years. I took over after he dropped dead, in fact, right there — right where you're standin'. Been doin' it ever since."

Although this is a frightening scenario, this story is absolutely true!

I never had the pleasure of meeting Old Charlie, but I knew I had a tough battle in front of me to retrain his replacement and, hopefully, prevent a recurrence of the tragedy that had befallen

Old Charlie.

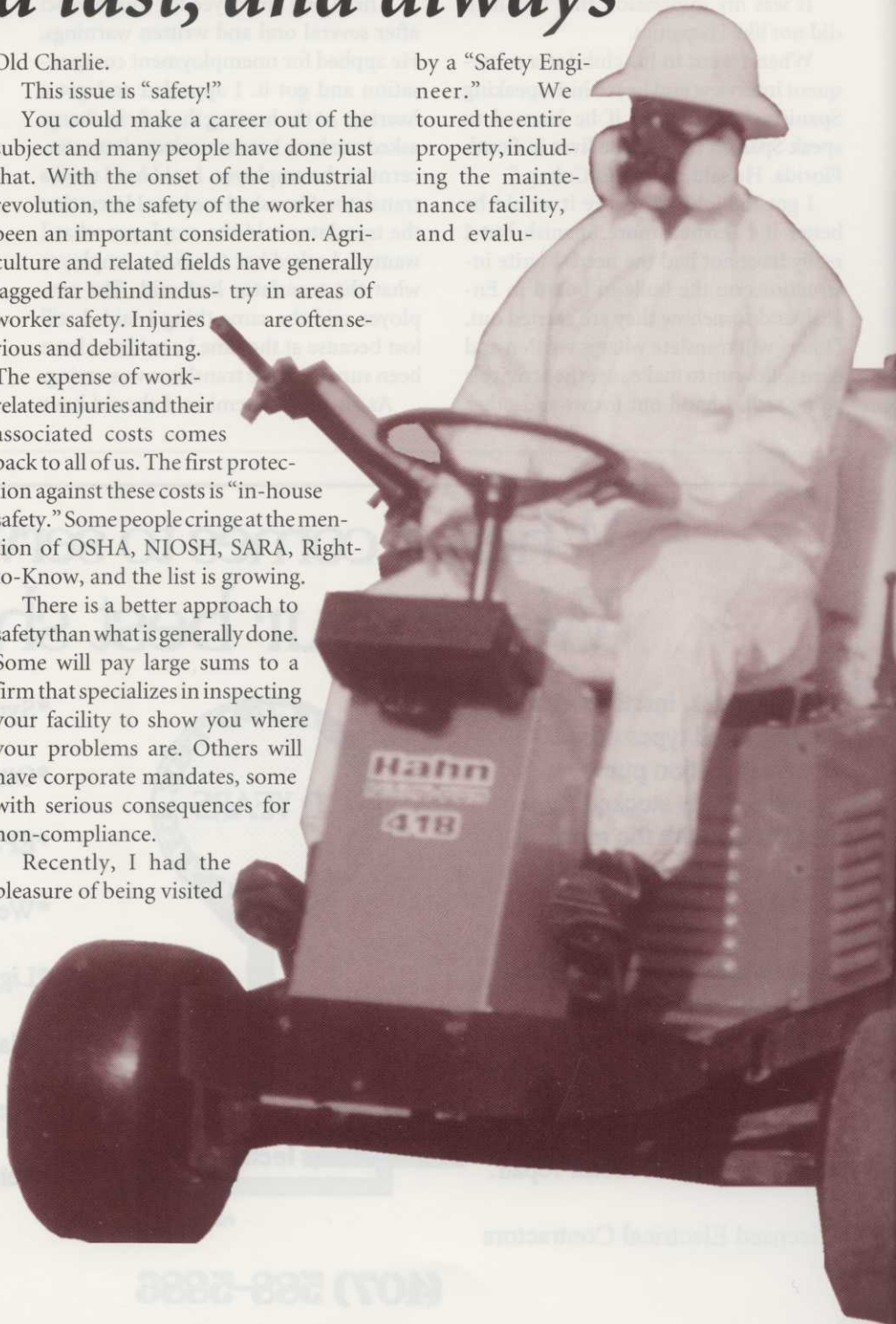
This issue is "safety!"

You could make a career out of the subject and many people have done just that. With the onset of the industrial revolution, the safety of the worker has been an important consideration. Agriculture and related fields have generally lagged far behind industry in areas of worker safety. Injuries are often serious and debilitating. The expense of work-related injuries and their associated costs comes back to all of us. The first protection against these costs is "in-house safety." Some people cringe at the mention of OSHA, NIOSH, SARA, Right-to-Know, and the list is growing.

There is a better approach to safety than what is generally done. Some will pay large sums to a firm that specializes in inspecting your facility to show you where your problems are. Others will have corporate mandates, some with serious consequences for non-compliance.

Recently, I had the pleasure of being visited

by a "Safety Engineer." We toured the entire property, including the maintenance facility, and evalu-



ated our site. The items that were pointed out during this tour were common to most golf course maintenance operations, but that only served to illustrate that the commonplace problems that we see daily are usually the most dangerous. In fact, most accidents occur because someone has become complacent about safety. This is the starting point for an effective safety program.

A very innovative safety expert that I met recently used the story of Sleeping Beauty to further illustrate the safety issue. Without stealing his entire lecture, suffice it to say that if Sleeping Beauty had not been beautiful, Prince Charming would probably have ridden away without stopping to investigate.

Safety,



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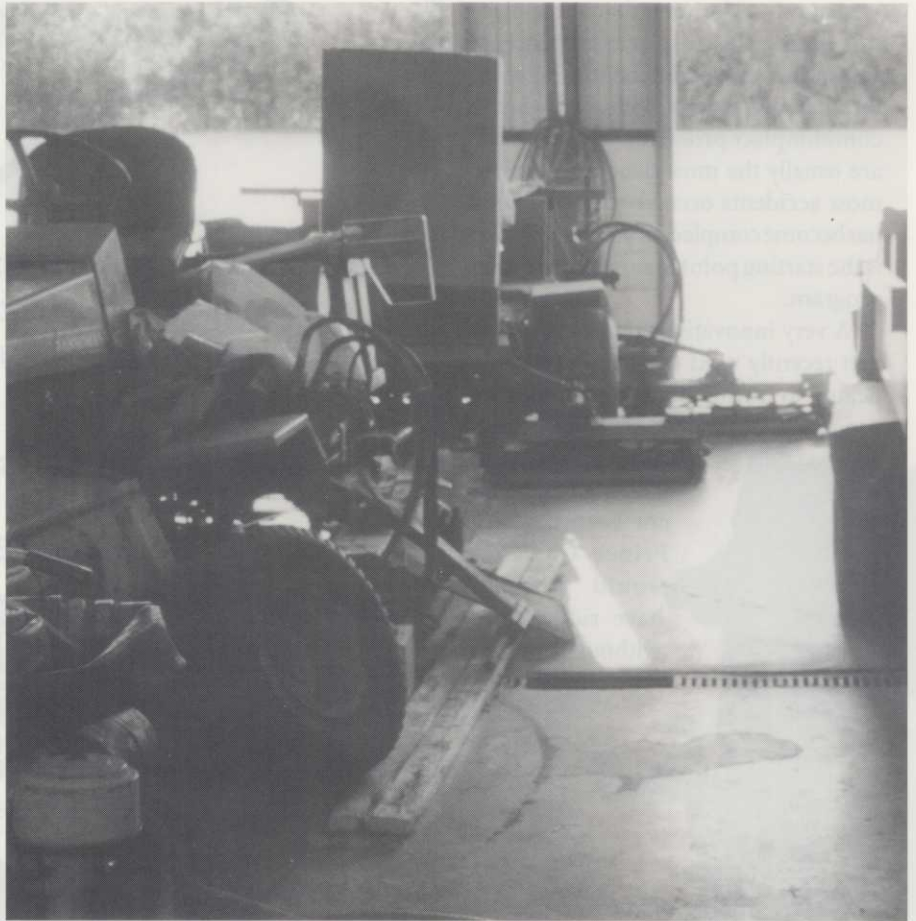
The insecticide was floating in the air and a large amount had become attached to the technician. His appearance was not unlike a honeybee that had been furiously working in flowers all day. His eyebrows were thick with the stuff and even the hairs in his nostrils were coated!

however, does not allow us to simply ride away and pretend that we didn't see Sleeping Ugly. We just have to "get off the horse and pucker up!" In other words, we must embrace the regulations and the agencies responsible for monitoring compliance, rather than being fearful and apprehensive.

The first step is to simply make safety a priority and sell that idea to your staff and crew.

The assistant superintendent and the shop foreman will be the first line of communication on safety issues. Post signs and posters highlighting safety items like speed limits, fueling procedures, clear lanes, combustibles, etc.

Many companies will provide posters at no charge. Some posters are available from the regulatory agencies. Probably the most effective are those that are done "in-house." Better yet, ask your employ-



A jumble of machinery in the building that doesn't allow for unhindered exit is just asking for trouble.

ees to create the safety notices that are needed. Involvement in the program will help the employee remember the safety rules and give him/her a sense of ownership in the safety program.

One common mistake made by users

The commonplace problems that we see daily are usually the most dangerous. In fact, most accidents occur because someone has become complacent.

and handlers of pesticides is the proper filing and use of the Manufacturer's Safety Data Sheet. The idea of the MSDS is to provide quick access to information about products being used in the workplace. Specifically, in the event of exposure, anyone can immediately access information to protect the exposed individual from additional injury. If this can't be easily done, most inspectors will strongly advise a revision of the system and, in some cases, issue written warnings about the methods used to access information from the MSDS.

The simplest solution is to maintain a book or folder of MSDS's that relate to only what is in current use. Products that were used in the past must be kept on file but that file may be "inactive." This will reduce the size of the book or folder and make the information inside much easier to find. Any employee that will use or





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come into contact with a hazardous material must be advised of the location of the MSDS and his/her right to access them. This part of the program falls under the Right-To-Know laws. RTK is a compliance area that should be the subject for entire training sessions.

A sign-up sheet or roll call form is necessary to keep records of the employees attending those sessions. The U.S. Department of Labor can assist with materials that can be used in training and compliance. Another good source of information is the public library. Your as-

sociation can also be a source of information and, probably even more importantly, experience. Superintendents that have been through the inspection process will usually be glad to relate those experiences and provide advice for the asking.

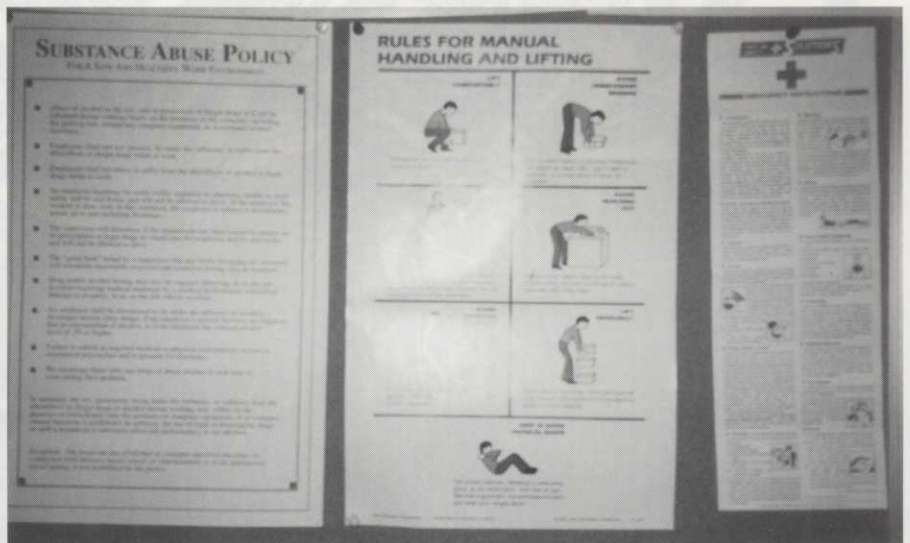
You and members of your staff should thoroughly inspect your own facility for unsafe conditions. For example, a jumble of machinery in the building that doesn't allow for unhindered exit is just asking for trouble. Old barrels and pesticide containers can be seen almost everywhere

you choose to look. Requiring the crew to protect themselves is also part of the process. Furnish safety equipment like goggles, gloves, rubber boots and gloves, coveralls, respirators, and, probably more important than all of this, provide the training to use these items properly.

Forming a safety committee made up of representatives from each department in the club provides consistency and continuity in a safety program. Regular, structured meetings of this committee assure a pro-active stance on safety and related

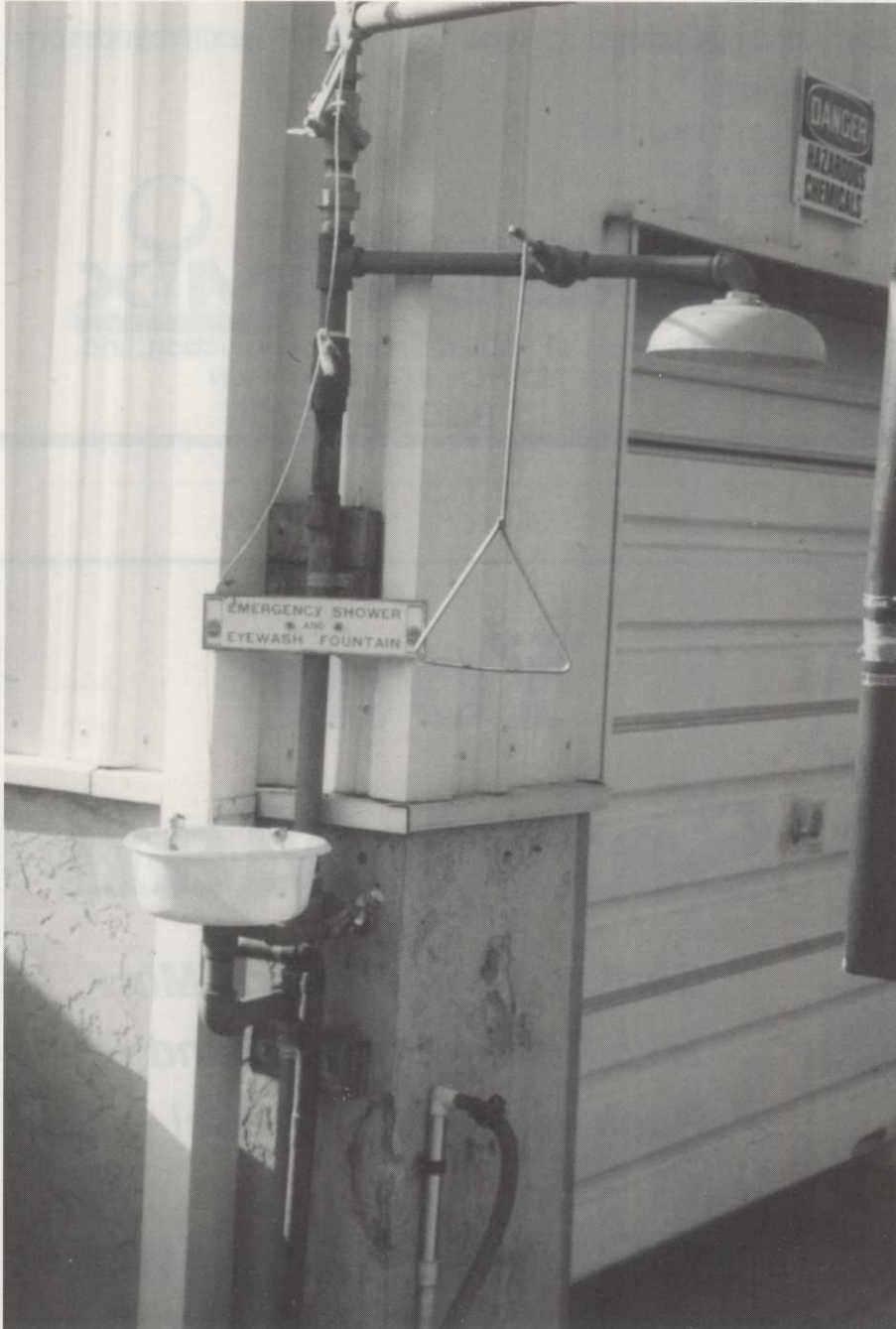


Certain types of tasks are better left to those that are experts in the area. Non-routine tasks are a cause of many injuries simply because the people involved are not familiar with the job.



Instructions on proper lifting techniques and basic first-aid, and a clearly-worded policy on substance abuse are all part of a good safety program.

The real issue in all of this is: Teach people not to be stupid.



An emergency shower and eyewash fountain are located as closely as possible to the site where the accident is likely to happen.

issues. Keeping good records of these meetings is strong evidence of a willingness to comply with regulations. Obviously, each committee member must take the message back to their respective departments; otherwise, the safety program won't work.

The market has been inundated with "compliance kits" that, in some cases really can help you implement an effective program. However, most of the necessary materials and information is available free of charge from the regulatory agencies themselves. Some of the more useful items available from other sources are tapes, both audio and video that can be effective tools for training.

Once you have begun a safety and compliance program, you will usually be surprised at the scope of the issues. Upon discovering one area that requires attention, several other areas may be revealed. The size of the undertaking is probably the most dangerous pitfall in the continued effectiveness of any program of this type. Avoiding this problem is easier than one would think.

Golf course superintendents are expert managers of mayhem.

Consider some of the projects and just day-to-day obstacles thrown into your path. Somehow we still seem to finish what we start and, eventually, the end arrives. The same is true of this exercise, with one notable exception. It never ends! New problems and issues arise; laws change; restrictions increase (and seldom decrease); and the challenge never goes away. Handle this the same way you would handle other maintenance operations. Guide and direct. Delegate and follow-up. Take one item and see it through to completion. Set meeting times and dead-





Having all safety notices in one place makes it easy for everyone to know right where to look.

lines in advance and stick to momentum and “life” in this kind of project. It

has become routine and is now as much a part of what we do as mowing schedules and fertilizer programs.

The real issue in all of this is: Teach people not to be stupid.

I once watched in amazement as a person stepped out of the bucket of a cherry picker to reach “one more limb” and fall 40 feet to the ground. Fortunately (?) for him, a large limb about two-thirds of the way down broke his fall (also, three ribs and one arm). Was that one limb worth it?

This particular accident occurred because the superintendent was too optimistic about the capabilities of his department. There comes a time when certain types of tasks are better left to those that are experts in the area. Non-routine tasks are a cause of many injuries simple because the people involved are not familiar with the job and supervisors lack knowledge and experience (and time) to train people for the task.

Each superintendent should carefully analyze the job and determine the feasibility of in-house execution. If it proves to be unfeasible, make a strong recommendation that the job be contracted out. Usually, explaining the liabilities and expense will be sufficient to tip the scales in favor of the contractor.

Employees often resist the implemen-

The regulatory agencies state specifically that you may have a greater degree of safety regulation and stricter rules than the agencies' guidelines.

tation of a strong safety program. They view the use of some of the safety equipment as an encumbrance and discomfort. Many will argue that restricted vision, movement, or heat retention will create a safety problem rather than alleviate one. These objections must be handled diplomatically.

The old standard, “Because I said so,” or “I’ll fire you!,” just won’t work with today’s workers. Careful explanation of the concerns for individual safety and health held by the management very of



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Note the respirators on bench, ready for use.

ten remove the objections. Some employees will retain a bad attitude and continue to resist.

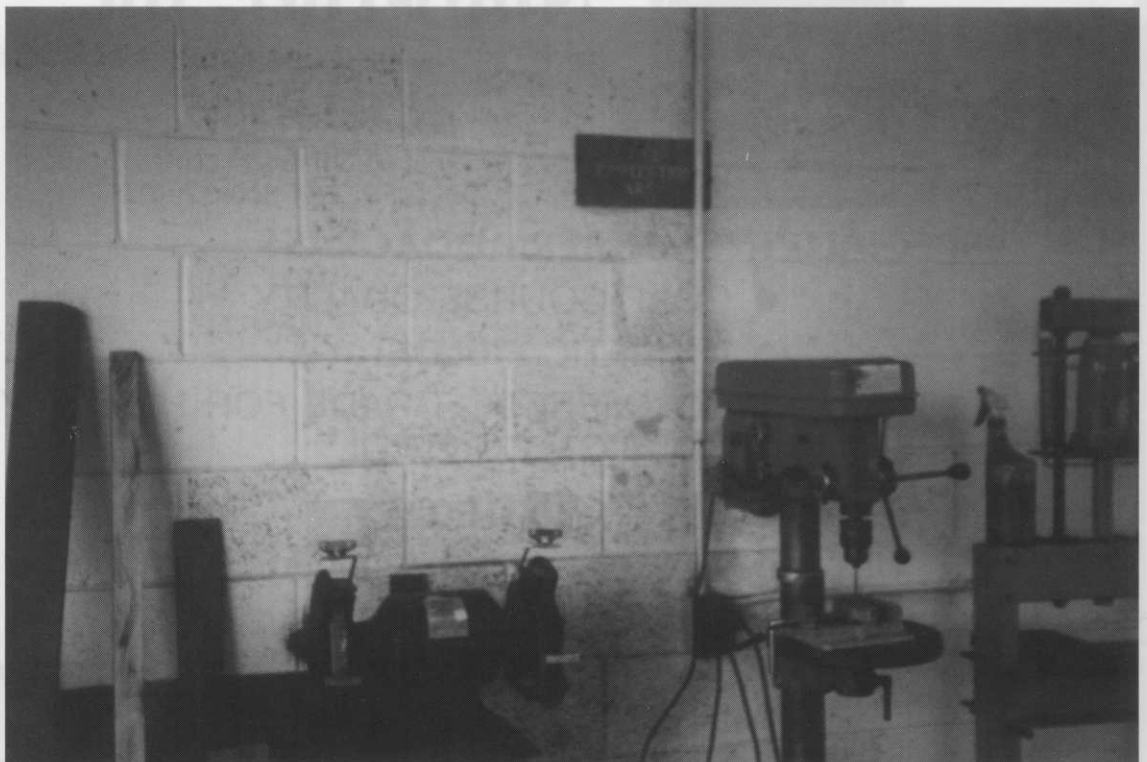
This is not all bad. People with this type of attitude are often disruptive to the efficiency and productivity of a department but they will single themselves out with their attitudes and be easier to iden-

tify and deal with. Remember, the regulatory agencies state specifically that you may have a greater degree of safety regulation and stricter rules than the agencies' guidelines. They also tell you and the employee that compliance with these policies set forth by the employer carry the weight of the law.

Regular meetings are conducted in the golf course maintenance department at this club.

Employees are encouraged to be creative and imaginative in all areas of the operation. When discussing safety issues, some employees will have constructive suggestions that really make a difference.

Machinery requiring eye protection is grouped and posted. The sign should probably be cleaned.



'How can any of you possibly object to something that is for your own good. The man is telling you that he doesn't want you to get hurt!'

One employee recently made a perspicuous observation. "How can any of you (fellow employees) possibly object to something that is for your own good. The man is telling you that he doesn't want you to get hurt!"

Following that comment, a moment of silence prevailed. When I continued with the meeting, I closed the safety segment saying, "I can't think of anything to say that would better illustrate the objec-

tives of our safety program than what you have just heard."

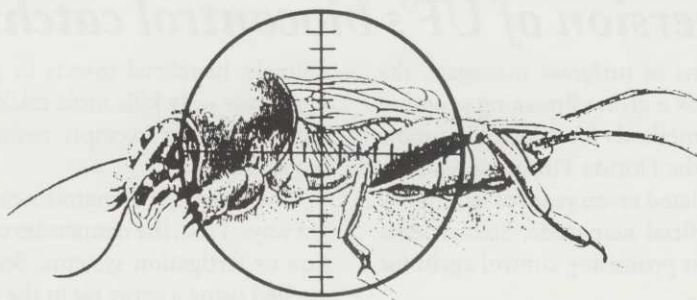
Getting started requires nothing more than setting a date for the first meeting and doing it.

A basic agenda of four or five items will generate enough discussion to fuel conversation for a half hour. Employees should be encouraged to voice their concerns and superintendents should follow up with management to assure that em-

ployees' concerns are adequately communicated. Some companies reward employees for reporting unsafe conditions or dangerous machinery.

Remember, the objective of a safety program is to prevent injury to employees. Pursuit of this objective will result in fewer accidents, less time loss due to injuries, lower workers' compensation premiums and, ultimately, a better overall operation.

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