

Don't Scrimp on Safety

Superintendents
can focus on
cost-conscious
ways to keep their
employees safe

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Living Well

PART 1: SAFETY

ON THE GOLF COURSE AND AT
THE MAINTENANCE FACILITY

Living Well Series

This story on *Safety on the Golf Course and the Maintenance Facility* marks Part One in *Golfdom's* summer-long Living Well series. Look for these stories in the coming months:

July – *How to Maintain a Healthy Marriage*

August – *Dealing with the Threat of Skin Cancer*

September – *Watch Out for Lyme Disease*

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cott Frase loved working with his superintendent father, Bob, while growing up in northeast Ohio. When he was 9 years old, Scott raked bunkers and mowed fairways. He fondly remembers eating lunch with his father each day in the maintenance barn — a

converted chicken house where the course stored its exotic chemicals, including arsenic-based compounds. He munched his chip-chopped ham sandwiches and soaked up the atmosphere, blissfully convinced he wanted to work on a golf course forever.

But in 1976, when he was 12, Scott's dreams took a detour. Doctors at Akron (Ohio) Children's Hospital, diagnosed Scott with a blood disorder called hypoplastic anemia. His blood cell counts — red, white and platelet — plummeted dangerously, rendering him susceptible to infections. As doctors scrambled to discover the cause of Scott's illness, they casually mentioned to his father that arsenic poisoning could play a significant role in the disease's onset. Bob's mind raced back to all those lunches in the chicken house. He shuddered.

"The doctors never said exactly what caused Scott to contract the disease," Bob says in a quiet voice. "But arsenic can play a large role, and we were always around the poison on the course. Back then, you didn't think about safety the way you do now. But when they diagnosed Scott, it hit me how irresponsible I'd been."

Superintendents have a responsibility for the safety of their employees and others, as Bob found out 25 years ago. If a course has a seven-figure budget





HUGH AYLWARD

it's easier to enforce safety regulations. But superintendents at mid-level clubs often struggle to balance the need to protect their employees and the need to protect the bottom line. Fortunately, there are some small-scale safety measures that help them meet those goals.

Scott, who recovered and now fulfills his childhood dream as superintendent at Congress Lake Club, a private course in Hartville, Ohio, sees his father often. Bob is about 15 minutes away, tending Sable Creek GC, the public facility he owns. Bob knows the safety issues at Congress Lake well because *he* was the superintendent for 14 years before Scott, 37, took over for him (though it is not the course where Scott worked as a child). They often compare notes on what they can do to increase employee safety at the courses.

"We like to think we're pretty safety conscious, but there are always ways to improve," Scott says. "You can never take safety lightly."

Make time for meetings

Both Bob and Scott hold regular safety training meetings with their crews to go over ba-

sics, covering issues such as wearing safety glasses and proper personal protective equipment when they're maintaining their courses. Safety videos line Scott's office shelves, their battered cases bearing witness to their frequent use.

"There are times when I'm pleased that it rains all day," Bob says. "It gives me another opportunity to pop in a safety tape and gather my people together to watch it."

Videotapes are an inexpensive tool to teach employees that safety matters, Scott says. If you can't afford them, conduct regular safety meetings, which provide employees an opportunity to ask questions about safety procedures they don't understand, Scott says.

Provide proper equipment

Scott says he provides each of his employees with a pair of safety glasses with their names engraved on the sides. He believes personalized glasses provide extra incentive for his crew to wear them while on the course.

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Scott Frase, superintendent of Congress Lake Club in Hartville, Ohio (right), credits his father, Bob, with teaching him the importance of employee safety.

Scott Frase provides each of his employees with a pair of safety glasses with their names engraved on the sides.

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Scott also supplies employees with hard hats, but he doesn't require that they wear them because he doesn't want to become a hard-hat monitor.

"You have a mix of people here. Some are extremely safety conscious and others aren't," Scott says. "If they're not going to wear them, they need to be extra vigilant when they're working while golfers are on the course."

Bob recommends employees designate one crew member to watch golfers hit while the others work on a project. "The one designated watcher can warn the others if a ball is headed their way," Bob says.

Enforce the rules

In a tight labor market with limited licensed employees, it's tempting to let *all* employees handle chemicals, Bob says. But if the state requires licensed applicators to do the job, don't break the law, he adds.

"I have two licensed applicators, and one of them is me," Bob says. "We're the only guys allowed to spray."

Scott says he'd like to license all employees to spray chemicals. While his course employs four licensed applicators, training costs money that Scott doesn't always have in his budget.

"When you work at a mid-level club, you have to pick and choose where you want to

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Progressive Protection

Personal protective equipment suffers from an image crisis. Previous equipment such as safety glasses, hard hats and gloves may have met government safety standards, but they rated zero as a fashion statement. In addition, some of the equipment was bulky and uncomfortable.

That has changed in recent years, according to Rick Wohlner, president of Northbrook, Ill.-based Compliance Safety, a distributor and manufacturer of safety equipment. He says manufacturers recognized the importance of combining safety with comfort and style. Here's a snapshot of how personal safety equipment has evolved:

■ **Gloves** — Older gloves protected workers' hands from injury while on the job, but they prevented employees from having adequate control over their equipment because they were thick and stiff, Wohlner says.

Wohlner says superintendents should invest in waterproof, insulated leather gloves. Leather provides employees excellent flexibility, and waterproofing allows the gloves to be versatile. But the most important breakthrough is adding insulation, Wohlner says. In the past, superintendents could either buy flexible gloves or waterproof gloves, but the two were difficult to combine. Insulation has changed the equation, he says.

"People have complained for years that when traditional gloves got wet, their hands got wet," he says. "Insulation prevents that"

■ **Body protection** — Tyvek suits have dri-

ven superintendents crazy for years, Wohlner says.

They make workers look like

they're dealing with nuclear disasters rather than applying pesticides. They're also hot and uncomfortable for employees who frequently work during the heat of the day. But employees still need protection while they're out spraying, Wohlner says.

"You need to wear a laminated fabric when applying pesticides," Wohlner says. "Manufacturers have developed some products that provide adequate coverage without the hassle of the traditional Tyvek suits."

Wohlner says the trend is toward laminated aprons. Some new aprons come with sleeves that offer similar protection without the discomfort.

■ **Eyewear** — Safety glasses have changed so they don't look like big, bulky plastic shields, Wohlner says. They're lighter and more comfortable to wear, and look more like sunglasses than safety glasses, he says.

"In the past, superintendents had a hard time getting crew members to wear safety glasses because they looked so awkward," Wohlner says. "It's human nature. You don't want to wear anything that's going to make you look bad."

The breakthrough was making a smaller, more versatile lens that still provides the same level of safety, he says. The addition of tints to the lenses and lighter earpieces

have, in some cases, made sunglasses and safety glasses indistinguishable to the casual observer, he says.

■ **Respiratory protection** — Employees hated to don old-style respirators because elastic bands pulled hair, and plastic filters made breathing difficult, Wohlner says. The plastic retained heat, causing wearers to sweat profusely also. The respirators often interfered with the performance of other tasks when not in use, flapping around as they hung from employees' necks.

Newer respirators have eliminated elastic bands and have been re-engineered to hang against the chest when not in use, Wohlner says. They also feature exhale valves to make them easier to breathe through and keeps the users' faces cool.

■ **Hearing protection** — The rigid ear plugs of previous years had two negatives: They were uncomfortable, and they blocked out *all* noise, Wohlner says. While protection from excessive noise is important, workers

must hear some things, such as a shout of "look out!" from a co-worker.

Today's earplugs, which filter dangerous noise rather than block out all sound, range from earmuff-style noise blockers to soft, foam disposable earplugs that mold to the ear for a more comfortable fit, Wohlner says.

— Frank H. Andorka Jr.



Safety glasses are often indistinguishable from sunglasses.

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Scott (above) says he wants to replace his 1950s-era pesticide storage facility with a more modern one when finances allow.

Bob Frase (right) orders chemicals only in amounts he needs to avoid overcrowding his storage facility.



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spend your money," Scott says. "For the time being, there are other places where the money is better used."

Hire a safety coordinator

When Bob worked at Congress Lake, he hired one person to coordinate his safety programs with the specific title safety coordinator. He felt his time was better spent on course conditioning rather than filling out forms and monitoring manufacturer safety data sheets. Scott continues the practice.

"She keeps the MSDSs up to date, catalogues our pesticide applications and keeps track of all

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Safety in the Shop

Keeping your equipment in perfect condition also keeps your employees safe. Here's a list of often-overlooked maintenance items, says Chuck Greif, manager of worldwide golf and turf market development for John Deere Co.:

- Read the owner's manual so you know exactly what safety features a machine has. "If we could get operators to read the manuals, a lot of headaches would be avoided," Greif says.
- Ensure all safety switches are working properly. Greif says some operators bypass safety switches, such as the one that shuts motors off when operators leave their seats. Bypassing the safety switch allows an operator to leave the driver's seat and leave the motor running. It decreases the time it takes to mow a fairway, but increases the possibility of injury.
- Check parking brakes so machines don't roll forward unexpectedly.
- Keep all safety shields in place to avoid injury from objects thrown from mower blades.
- Instruct employees to wear gloves while adjusting cutting blades.
- Adjust bolts and regrease joints on a regular maintenance schedule.
- Examine a machine's rollover bar to determine whether it has the proper ballast to keep it upright when traveling on hillsides.

— F. A.

One of Bob Frase's pet peeves is when people don't pay attention when he is trying to teach them about safety.

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the paperwork," Scott says. "She is a big help."

Scott keeps copies of her records in his office and at the clubhouse. He does the same with his Hazard Communications plan, in case a fire destroys the maintenance facility. Scott recommends that all superintendents have a HazCom plan, even if they have to buy a template because they're too busy to create their own.

Serious about safety

Scott learned about committing to safety the hard way — by sacrificing his health. It took 10 years for his blood counts to return to normal, but he has been disease free for the last 15 years. He still loves working on a golf course more than anything in the world,

but he understands the importance of creating a safe environment for his employees. He says he doesn't want to suffer the same guilt his father did.

"I never let the disease get me down, but I could see that it bothered him immensely," Scott says. "I was more irritated that it prevented me from trying out for the football team. In retrospect, I realize how serious my situation was. It makes me appreciate how responsible I am for the health and safety of my crew members."

Bob echoes the sentiment.

"One of my pet peeves is when people don't pay attention when I'm trying to teach them about safety," he says. "You have to stay on them to make sure they're protecting themselves while they're under your care." ■

Defibrillator Demand?

A golfer playing your course suddenly collapses on the seventh fairway. His playing partner shouts to a maintenance crew member to help his friend, whose heart has stopped. What would your crew member do?

First, he should call 911 to bring professional medical help to the course. But while he's waiting, he could save a life if armed with an automated external defibrillator (AED).

According to the American Heart Association (AHA), sudden cardiac arrest claims nearly 220,000 lives per year. For every minute that a heart attack victim goes without defibrillation, the person's chances of survival decrease between 7 percent and 10 percent, according to the AHA. If a person is down for eight to 10 minutes, the person has almost no chance of survival. That's why AEDs on golf courses may make sense.

An AED is designed to send an electrical shock to someone's heart if it has stopped beating. Most modern AEDs contain microprocessors that analyze whether or not someone needs defibrillation before sending its shock. If the person doesn't need it, the machine won't send the electrical current, says Steve Jamroz, brand manager for Survivalink AEDs, which are distributed by Softspikes.

Jamroz says it's important to understand the difference between having a simple heart attack and experiencing sudden car-

diac arrest. Victims of sudden cardiac arrest have no pulse, no heartbeat and no

breath, so it's important to respond quickly.

"The AHA found that golf courses are the fifth likeliest place for someone to have sudden cardiac arrest," Jamroz says. "The combination of exercise and hot sun during a four- to five-hour round of golf puts an extraordinary strain on the heart. Golf courses

'The AHA found that golf courses are the fifth likeliest place for someone to have sudden cardiac arrest.'

— STEVE JAMROZ

should be prepared for emergencies under these conditions."

Dennis Watkins, superintendent at Lords Valley CC in Newfoundland, Pa., says he supported his course's decision to buy the machines.

"We bought three units and trained everybody in a couple of hours," Watkins says. "We haven't used them yet, but we feel better having them. Defibrillator technology is simple these days."

Superintendents' concerns

Jamroz says most superintendents have three concerns about AEDs — cost, training and liability. At \$3,000, a machine is not cheap, and courses should own more

than one, Jamroz says.

"People shouldn't think of this as a one-machine investment because each range should have one," Jamroz says. "The more machines you have on a course, the more prepared you will be if something happens."

The training, which costs between \$50 and \$70 per person depending on geographical location, consists of a four-hour class. The golf course must also have a medical director to oversee training and use of the AED. The medical director can be a doctor who belongs to the course.

Even with such medical oversight, however, superintendents still worry their courses will be held liable if something goes wrong.

"Liability issues will always be part of the discussion," says Clark Rowles, superintendent at Nakoma GC in Madison, Wis. "But any time you can save a life, it's a good thing."

Laws such as the federal Cardiac Arrest Survival Act and Good Samaritan statutes in most states provide protection from liability in the use of AEDs.

Despite the potential benefits, some superintendents would rather leave lifesaving to the professionals.

"I can see their use where they must be grabbed in a hurry," says Don Mahaffey, superintendent at the Torres Blancas GC in Green Valley, Ariz. "But on a golf course, the last thing I want my guys to do is try and find an AED instead of getting help there as quickly as possible. That is not just my opinion; my local fire department also wants it that way." — FA.