Minnesota May Spur Nationwide Use Of Head Protection and Roll-Bars

Minnesota may not traditionally be viewed as a "trend-setter" state like California or Florida, but new enforcement tactics by the state's Department of Labor & Industry may spur a nationwide move toward the use of head protection and equipment roll-bars.

According to a letter circulated to superintendents and other interested groups in the state, Minnesota OSHA plans to upgrade enforcement based on two rules:

"Rollover Protection and seatbelts are required on all motorized, self-propelled vehicles and mowers that are equipped with a 20 horsepower motor and above (§ 182.653, Subp. 2). Four-wheeled vehicles and mowers operating on flat terrain only will be exempt. Three-wheeled vehicles have no exemption."

"Any employee exposed to flying objects or subjected to possible injury by flying objects needs to wear head protection (such as a hard hat). Employers are required to provide this head protection for their employees."

The letter goes on to make it clear that golf courses are a primary focus of both new enforcement initiatives.

According to Joe Moris, immediate past president of the Minnesota GCSA, the chapter plans to work with state OSHA to communicate the decision and help superintendents comply.

Jules DeCoster, a former superintendent who now serves as a risk management consultant for golf courses, says head protection should be standard for workers in high risk areas of the course. "It's crazy not to provide hard hats," DeCoster says. "It doesn't cost a lot, and the superintendent's neck is stuck out a mile if he isn't doing it."

One unclear issue: What is the safety standard for head protection? DeCoster and several safety products representatives agree that OSHA does not provide a clear ANSI standard or other guidance for protection from small flying objects like golf balls. But, according to DeCoster, any effort to provide protection will help reduce the potential liability a course could incur.

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