

Warning label overkill

By Curt Harler/Managing Editor

Are the safety warning decals on motorized equipment really necessary any longer? Do they actually serve a purpose?

The corporate lawyers at any company that makes mowers and related equipment will argue an emphatic, "yes." But who actually reads them? Honestly, now, have you read the text of the warnings on the equipment you used yesterday? How many of our workers actually can read those warnings? How many take the time to do so?

Face it: Nobody reads warning statements on mowers any more than they read the warnings on cigarette packs (although everyone has a general idea of what their message is). Perhaps there is value in a warning label, not for the text it contains, but simply for the message it delivers that a dangerous situation exists nearby.

There is something wrong, however, when a simple \$1.69 child's beach ball contains warning messages — in 16 languages ranging from English to Portuguese, Russian, Italian and Chinese — about the dangers of using a beach ball as a life preserver. At least, I presume the warnings in Rumanian and Greek were similar to the ones in German

and Spanish, which I could translate easily.

And, yes, my daughter is proud possessor of that beach ball.

This is meaningless overkill. However important the message, it gets lost amid the din of other warning labels. Eventually, the typical label gets worn off or chipped off the equipment and becomes useless anyway. If those warnings did serve a purpose they would have to be replaced. . . just like spark plugs or wheel bearings. After all, it is not only the original user who needs to read and heed the warning. A person using six-year old equipment for the first time is in the same situation as a user taking delivery on a shiny, new mower.

How many messages do we, as managers, deliver each day that are lost in the background din? How do we get our message to stand out — whether it involves agronomy, overtime policy or equipment safety? Or, is it time that we embrace a simple symbol, like an exclamation mark or the graphic severed foot warning, to indicate danger and forget the verbiage that so many people are unable to read anyway?



Curt Harler
Managing Editor

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