

shucks the negative talk which feeds the fire. "I questioned a number of big associations and found there was almost no significant impact because of the so-called recession," he says. "The biggest defense against it is to do things on a positive note, take a move to create new business unless the crippling cost of cash flow makes it impossible."

Because of the high fuel expense, Owen methodically routes his crews to reduce driving and reminds them to idle trucks less. When working in a neighborhood, someone will canvas the area to describe services and spread the name of General Tree Service.

The company advertises no more than it always has, but sends a special printing of its brochure to certain accounts—offices, commercial installations, or factories which need landscape. "This market considers tree care a necessity," says Owens.

Reaching the level of clients who can afford the arborist's service through advertising and other efforts will become increasingly important in the future, Owen thinks. Other pursuits he considers vital to survival are to be a top-line professional in a diversified manner, and to realize this professionalism particularly in the area of integrated pest management.

Down in San Antonio, TX, the Horti-Care Corp., owned by Alan Brook, has raised its volume 10 percent with consideration for inflation. Small accounts on fixed retirement incomes have dropped off, but otherwise business has been strong. "I've always had people say 'it's too much, I can't afford it,'" says Brook. "I take the approach that if they're going to take care of their trees, they can't wait until next year."

Brook is trying to get better people and equip-

Continues on page 75

TREE CARE SAFETY PROGRAMS—FACT OR FICTION



By Robert Felix,
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In 1979, accident frequency in the tree care industry increased by 30% over 1978.

Workers compensation rates continue to increase at an alarming rate.

These are statistical facts that cannot be disputed. Everybody talks about safety. Many claim to have safety programs, but how many of these programs are effective?

Paying lip service to safety, passing out safety bulletins without explanations, and assuming that tree workers understand is a presumption that the tree care industry cannot afford.

The only way to reduce the frequency of lost time accidents and reduce your cost of workers compensation insurance is to make a sincere effort to properly train your employees. This requires time and costs money but it pays dividends. Anything less is a figment of your imagination. Anything less is a fictitious safety program!

Some say that "It's safe if you know how to do it!" That is a half truth. It is only safe if you know how to do it, safely.

The tree care industry is a high risk industry. The heights that we work at, the electrical hazards involved, the equipment that we work with, and the pesticides that we use each pose a threat to the safety of the untrained. It is easy to measure an increased cost for insurance, but not so easy to measure the pain and suffering resulting from an

injury, much less production and inefficiency.

Much of this can be avoided with an ongoing safety program. Such programs exist in the form of slide/cassette programs from the National Arborist Association, as well as a Tail Gate Safety program. Both are based on the Z-133.1 Standard of the American National Standards Institute, "Safety Requirements for Pruning, Trimming, Repairing, Maintaining and Removing Trees, and for Cutting Brush."

The economics of a safety program without even giving any consideration to the pain or suffering of an injured worker are very simple. For example: If a three-man crew, which ordinarily produces \$60 per hour, devoted one hour per week to safety, lost production for the year would be about \$3,000. At an average of \$6 per hour per worker, plus payroll taxes and benefits, the payroll cost per year would be \$1,125 resulting in a loss of revenue of only \$1,875 per year.

Three men earning an average of \$6 per hour would earn \$37,440 per year. If your manual rate for workers compensation was 20%, your cost would be \$7,488 per year. A 25% experience credit would equal \$1,872, as much as was sacrificed in revenue for the one hour per week safety training program, plus fewer lost-time accidents and more production.

The National Arborist Association safety training programs are tailor made for the tree care industry. The slide/cassette program provides an audio/visual exposure to safe practices presented in an informal atmosphere. The Tail Gate Safety Program is highly structured yet designed to be presented in the field. It includes attendance records and provides all of the necessary ingredients required by OSHA.

Tree care safety is an essential ingredient in good arboricultural practice. We must do a better job of putting it into practice.

For more information on the slide/cassette and Tail Gate Safety programs, contact the National Arborist Association, Inc., 3537 Stratford Road, Wantagh, NY 11793, 516/221-3082.