

TRIMMERS: they must 'feel' right

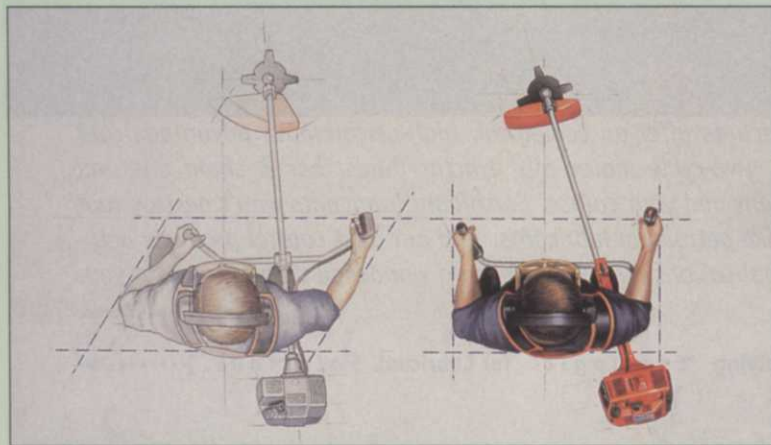
Employers bolster productivity by making employees more comfortable as they work. They also save on workman's compensation claims, training costs and lost work days.

This is called ergonomics, the study of how people interact



PHOTOS COURTESY HUSQVARNA

Trimmer design should allow for ease of movement from side-to-side.



A tool designed with proper ergonomics in mind can be worth extra cost.

with their working environment. Landscape professionals—whether they realize it or not—base decisions on ergonomics.

"Ergonomics means recognizing what mechanical factors contribute to workplace injuries," says Dr. Stephen Dawkins, an ergonomics specialist with Occupational Health International of Atlanta, a company that focuses on work-related injuries. "For a lawn professional these factors involve everything from tool design to vibration in equipment to how tools are used."

Workers who perform repetitive tasks or use vibrating hand tools are at a higher risk of developing problems like carpal tunnel syndrome, a disease that damages the nerves in the wrist.

These "cumulative trauma disorders" now make up almost 70 percent of occupational illnesses, says the Bureau of Labor Statistics. New technology may be responsible for the rapid rise in injury reports.

"Many of the tools that we use allow us to work faster and create an environment where the body is not able to keep up," Dawkins says.

Many contractors already take ergonomics into account when selecting equipment, even if they've never heard the term.

Ray Knoll, landscape maintenance supervisor for Western DuPage Landscaping, Naperville, Ill., says he's willing to pay about \$500 more for a hydrostatic riding mower that won't cause operators to have foot and leg cramps.

Howard Mees, vice president of operations for Environmental Care Inc., Calabasas, Calif., also looks for hydrostatic models with quiet transmissions.

"We don't think of it as ergonomics; we think of it as operator comfort and client friendliness," he says.

If a tool appears to be causing worker discomfort and injuries, Dawkins recommends paying up to 20 percent more for ergonomically designed equipment that reduces these problems.

Dawkins suggests buying pruners, trimmers and edgers that allow operators to work with their hands close to the body, in comfortable positions. Double shoulder straps that are well-padded also increase comfort, adds Mark Michaels, senior forestry product manager for Husqvarna in the United States.

To minimize cumulative trauma disorders for your landscape employees, here's a checklist from the University of Utah Research Foundation:

- ▶ Are reaches as close to the body as possible and always within 18 inches in front of the operator?
- ▶ Are there forceful or quick, sudden motions?
- ▶ Are there sustained static muscle contractions?
- ▶ Are there shocks or rapid build up of forces?
- ▶ Are workers restricted from changing body positions?

Most contractors like to try out equipment before they purchase. They should ask employees to use it also on a trial basis if possible.

Moore Landscapes Inc., Glenview, Ill., started a safety program 10 years ago. Today the 90-person company is reaping the unexpected benefits.

"When you can demonstrate that you care about your workers as well as your clients, that you invest in the best equipment possible, it's a good selling point for doing business with property managers," says Vice President of Maintenance Pedro Berreles. "It works for our customers, too." **LM**

COMMERCIAL LINE TRIMMERS AND BRUSHCUTTERS

COMPANY	SOME SPECIFICATIONS
Carswell Import Circle No. 280	Robin trimmers/brushcutters 20.3 cc-51.7 cc. Diaphragm-type carburetor. Solid state ignition. Centrifugal clutch. Attachments.
Echo Circle No. 281	Engines from 21. cc-37.4 cc. Commercial duty air filtration systems. Low-tone mufflers. Vibration-reduction. Throttle lock-out for brushcutters.
Hoffco Circle No. 282	Models 21 cc-30.5 cc. Six models with Walbro carburetor. Model WW88 with 85 cc displacement. Curved or straight drive shafts. Accessories.
Homelite Circle No. 283	4 new Green Machine trimmers and brushcutters. The 2600 and 2800 models with Tap-for-Cord line feed, 72" shaft, 17-inch trimming swath.
Husqvarna Circle No. 284	Trimmers, brush cutters, clearing saws. Displacements 21 cc-44 cc. Tap-N-Go heads. Models with heads set at angle to shaft for comfort.
Lesco Circle No. 285	Trimmers, brush cutters. Electronic ignitions. Air-cooled 2-cycle engines. Designed for heavy-duty commercial work.
Makita Circle No. 286	8 models, 22.2 cc-30.5 cc. Vibration-absorbing design. Large mufflers, Solid-state ignition. Diaphragm-type carburetors.
Maruyama Circle No. 287	Trimmers, brush cutters, multi-cutters with wide range of optional attachments. Trimmer displacements from 19.8 cc-31.8. Cutters to 50.2 cc.
Redmax Circle No. 288	Trimmers, cutters from 22.5 cc-41.5 cc. Centrifugal clutch, diaphragm carburetor. Also, 22.5 cc reciprocating trimmer/edger.
Shindaiwa Circle No. 289	Trimmers from 22.5 cc-27.2 cc. Brush cutters from 22.5-41.5 cc. Anti-vibration features. Vapor lock fuel system. Solid steel spined drive shaft.
Stihl Circle No. 290	Extended line from 19.6 cc-56.5 cc. Anti-vibration system. E-Z fill fuel tank, solid drive shaft, electronic ignition. Changeable attachments.
Tanaka Circle No. 291	Trimmers, brushcutters from 20 cc-46 cc. Sound reduction system. Electronic ignition. Anti-vibration engine. Some with Brain autofeed.



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