

Safety:

NEVER ENOUGH, NEVER TOO MUCH

by BARBARA G. HOWELL

OSHA, RCRA, EPA, MSDS, ANSI, DOT, WPS.

In the alphabet soup of safety rules, those of us working in the green industry are often caught in a stew. Some experts estimate that a single crew must comply with between 15 and 30 regulations—just from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

Consultants advise companies before OSHA inspections. Professional organizations like the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) and the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America (GCSAA) offer booklets and programs to ease compliance, training and safety. States have entered the safety arena with their own regulations, which often conflict with or override federal standards.

Ironically, these regulations do not even address the major safety concern of half the personnel in the green industry. Five of 10 owners and workers say vehicular safety—highway driving—is their biggest concern.

Carmen Zayas, human resources director for Clean Cut of Austin, Texas, explains:



Mix and apply products carefully, and wear the proper clothing and safety equipment.

"When applying chemicals, you can train and have control. Motor vehicles aren't under your control. There are so many other elements involved. My biggest

concern is defensive driving. You can do more damage than anyone else in the crew when you're driving."

Ron Mathews, vice president of Regal Landscape Services in Columbus, Ohio, agrees. "My biggest concern is being on the highway with trucks. There are a lot more accidents there than while mowing, especially with quick stops and dragging trailers."

What about regulations governing mowing and pesticide use? Most operators believe they are too numerous and too confusing.

Areas of concern in green industry

Here are the main areas of safety concern that are controlled by local, state and national laws:

- ▶ record-keeping of spills and accidents;
- ▶ posting of codes, signs and use of decals in the workplace;
- ▶ personal protection equipment (respirators, goggles, boots, gloves, etc.);
- ▶ keeping the workplace free of obvious and hidden hazards (oil cans near furnaces, unbalanced stacks of materials, etc.);
- ▶ regulation compliance as determined by inspections;
- ▶ proper handling and transportation of pesticides and hazardous material;
- ▶ monitoring of employee exposure to toxic substances;
- ▶ proper storage and disposal of pesticides and

containers;

- ▶ state certification of personnel;
- ▶ training of new and continuing employees;
- ▶ notification of customers and neighbors

when chemical applications are made;

- ▶ noise levels;
- ▶ fire and spill prevention, control and containment;

▶ temperature and ventilation control;

▶ compliance with label directions and availability of relevant material, including product Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDSs);

▶ safety features, conditions and proper use of equipment;

- ▶ emergency procedures;
- ▶ electrical systems and safety; and
- ▶ adequate exits and access. □

"The regulations are well-intentioned and not 100 percent attainable," says Todd Stevenson of Sports Turf Services, Boynton Beach, Fla. "Regulators think they are raising the level of public confidence in industry safety, but, in fact, many regulations do not measurably increase safety."

Sometimes, Zayas says, the volume of regulations and requirements actually hinders safety efforts. "We are constantly struggling to make time for activities in the field, conducting job analyses and coordinating hands-on training because we have to spend so much time on the documentation and paperwork involved."

"The amount of research time that goes into keeping up with new regulations and being in compliance is astronomical. It is indeed time-consuming when you have to make five phone calls just to figure out if a law applies to you. Often, the agencies that originated the regulations themselves do not have the employees available who can readily explain the ramifications of the legislation."

Even with all the areas of concern (see sidebar), some owners believe there need to be more regulations in some areas. Beverly Hills Landscaping owner Dave Mercure of Coral Springs, Fla. believes that a lot of tree

trimming is done unsafely. He and other pesticide applicators are also concerned about the number of illegal pesticide applicators not stopped because of insufficient regulation of pesticide sales or use.

Concern for safety of the employees and customers, even of those walking by when a weed-eater is in use, motivate owners to remind themselves and others that, as Mathews puts it, "any time we can do anything to help each other, it's good."

Even in equipment use, where operators are tempted to disengage safety switches, Ron Witt (owner of Ron's Lawn Care in Deerfield, Fla.) says, "Society in general is over-regulated, but lawn mowing is not. Safety shut-off switches are good and emissions control is okay."

Zayas at Clean Cut concludes: "Most employers have their employees' best interests in mind [in complying with regulatory efforts]. Not just because of the moral and ethical issues, but also because it makes financial sense."

"Money spent on medical costs, property damages, lost productivity—it all adds up. Therefore, it is in the employer's best interests to reduce accidents and injuries."

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Truck and trailer accidents are common in the green industry. Safe driving is just as important as proper pesticide use. Also, don't 'soup up' engines or remove guards.

10 safety tips

1. Get everyone to "think safety." Motivate employees with incentives.
2. Wear the proper safety gear.
3. Pay attention and be alert—at all times.
4. Mix and apply pesticides carefully. Remember the threat to homeowners and pets.
5. Secure equipment on trailers.
6. The label is the law. Follow it.
7. Leave all guards on power equipment, and don't defeat safety switches. Don't be careless when operating it.
8. Be relentless in communicating to employees that management will not tolerate negligent behavior.
9. Be safe in everything you do. Life is fragile: handle with care. Sell your service as being safe in every way.
10. Train employees in proper lifting techniques and make support devices available. □

Publications

"Rinsing and Disposing of Pesticide Containers," from the Ohio State University Cooperative Extension Service, 2021 Coffey Rd., Columbus, OH 43201

"Overall Safety," "Walk-Behind Safety Guidelines" and "Safe Riding Mower Use," from the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute, 341 S. Patrick St., Old Town Alexandria, VA 22314

"OSHA Handbook for Small Business," "Lockout/Tagout," "Eye and Face Protection," "Chemical Hazard Communication," "Personal Protective Equipment," others: OSHA Publications Office, 200 Constitution Ave., Washington, DC 20210

"Safety and Regulatory Resource Manual" from PLCAA, 1000 Johnson Ferry Rd., NE, Suite C-135, Marietta, GA 30068-2112 □