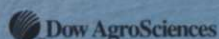




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continued from page 40

● **Productivity rate.** If you're more profitable with the same operation, chances are you're more productive. But are you getting the maximum levels of productivity? We suspect this industry has far to go before reaching those levels.

Landscape managers look ahead

Bozzuto Landscaping is focused on community housing projects in Maryland — on the front end of the housing market. Tom Davis hasn't seen any movement either way, yet. "Our parent company, which is a real estate developer, has 16 communities in construction and as many in development. It's too early for any slowdown to trickle down to us. And if new homes slow down, apartments may pick up."

The recent difficulties of regulation and labor encouraged both Paul Harder and Michael Kowalchuk to sell their businesses. Others are restructuring their management, instituting new and advanced operating software or working hard to develop employees.

Neil Thelen's investment in six-people Isuzu trucks and the switch to six-person crews is an effort to squeeze more efficiency from his organization while also developing his people. "Each crew has a senior and

junior foreman because one person can't manage six people," he says. "The younger manager can then get trained and eventually move into a senior position."

Dwight Hughes also remodeled his operations, using a new design of truck to carry people, equipment and plants. Hughes constantly searches for more efficiency and looks to equipment, rather than electronics, for solutions.

"Our industry is caught up in a trend of more computing, but computers are just a tool — not the answer," he says. "You have to ask, who's making the money for you? Is it a crew of workers pushing a B&B tree by hand or your computer?"

Keep the momentum coming!

As usual, fortune telling is an art few of us have. Experienced insiders like Rick Randall, CEO of Randall & Blake Inc., Littleton, CO, have business spread over several states. He sees some clouds on the horizon.

"It appears there is sufficient momentum to sustain adequate contracting opportunities at least through the first six months of 2001.

After that, we do see some softening brought about by higher interest rates," he explains. "The higher rates have begun to slow down residential development,



John Wheeler: Will economy slow?

What's your best strategy?

It pays to be prepared for any eventuality, say several landscape managers. Here are their ideas:

► **Landscape maintenance.** This can be a constant battle to eke out the profits you need because of low-balling. Try to balance the investment needed to get efficient equipment with money to pay a competitive wage and keep good employees. Some vow to raise their prices in coming months, both to accommodate fuel and other price increases and to position their firms above the "price-war" fray.

► **Landscape design/installation.** This is a more complex business to manage because it's hard to assure a manageable flow of projects, price goods and services for profit, invest in efficient equipment and organize the work for productivity. A clear niche, steady pricing, quality work, strong customer contact and investment in appropriate equipment may make a difference this year.

► **Chemical lawn care.** LCOs still grapple with the issues of low-balling, large competitors "churning" business, managing crews and routes for maximum productivity and balancing a simple and profitable mix of services. If you find the self-starters to handle your routes, do everything to keep them. Long-time players insist a solid treatment program, attentive customer service and add-on services will continue to make this segment profitable.

► **Irrigation maintenance/installation.** Landscapers are finding plenty of opportunity to offer irrigation services. The key to success depends on thorough knowledge, the ability to make this segment profitable and the capability of servicing all your potential customers.


► **Customers.** Both residential and commercial customers are impatient, spoiled and sometimes annoying. Develop a strategy to manage your customers' expectations and weed out those who are more trouble than they are worth.

► **Client mix.** Diversify. If you have only a few main customers, it's time to spread out and get others. If you're in a well-defined niche, expand within it.

which will slowly begin to pull down the rest of the economy."

John Wheeler also has some misgivings about the prospects for his design/build division: "It's too early to celebrate (for

this year). It's a good year now and we budgeted for an increase in business, but higher interest rates may slow down business. We hope the momentum keeps coming." **LM**

A surreal landscape where a large hand holds a scythe over a field of people fighting weeds. The scene is set in a rural area with rolling hills and a large tree on the right. In the foreground, a large hand holds a scythe, ready to cut. Below it, several people are bent over, pulling weeds. In the background, more people are visible, some holding scythes, working in a field. The overall tone is humorous and emphasizes the effectiveness of the herbicide.

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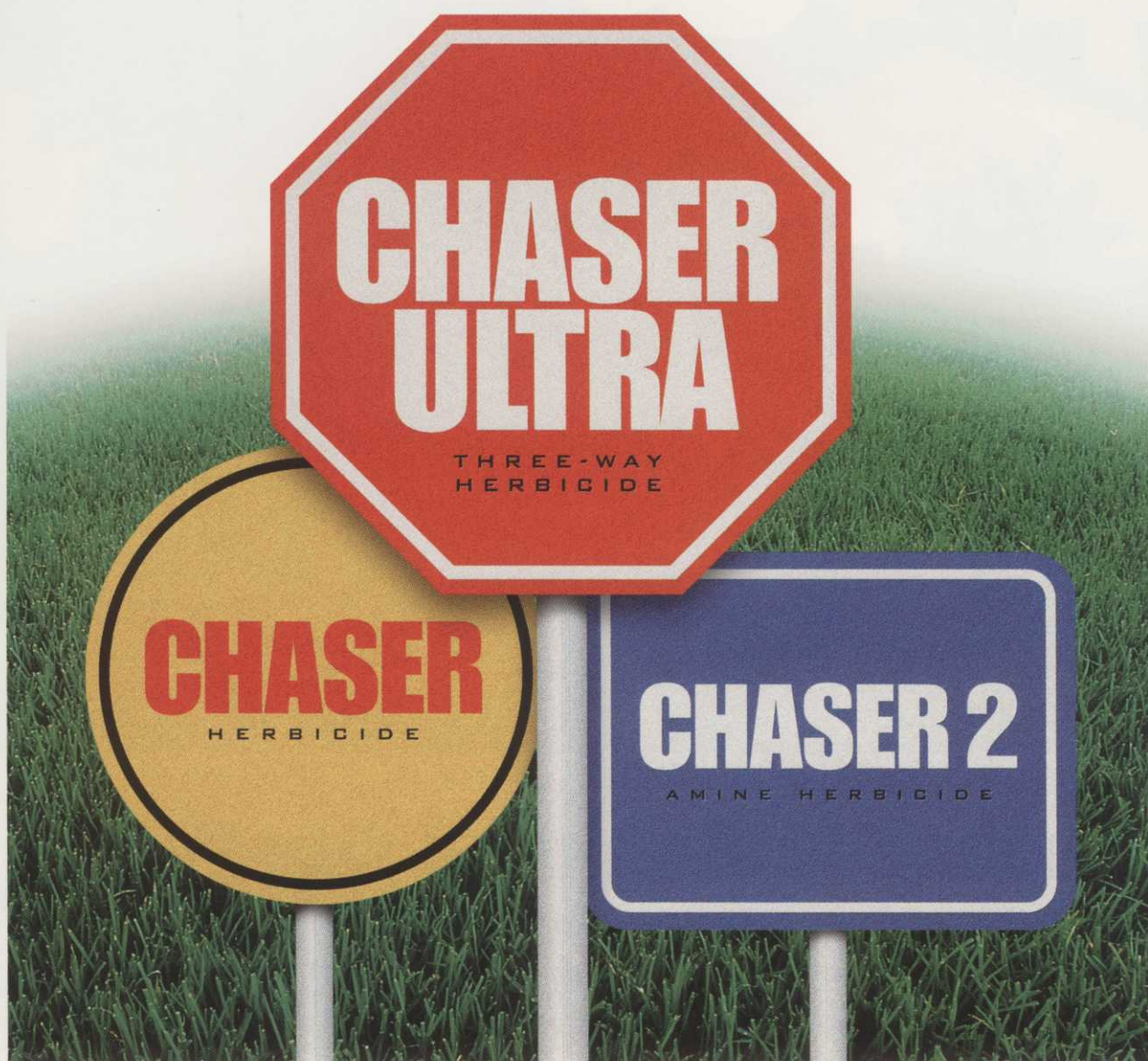
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Running your business means walking a fine line. You have to eliminate insect pests, but you have to do it without harming beneficial insects, plants or your workers. The answer? Conserve* SC turf and ornamental insect control. Nothing's better at controlling tough insect pests. And since it's derived from a naturally occurring organism, Conserve also controls your worries about plant damage and beneficials. Conserve. It's not a synthetic. It's not a biological. It's business insurance.

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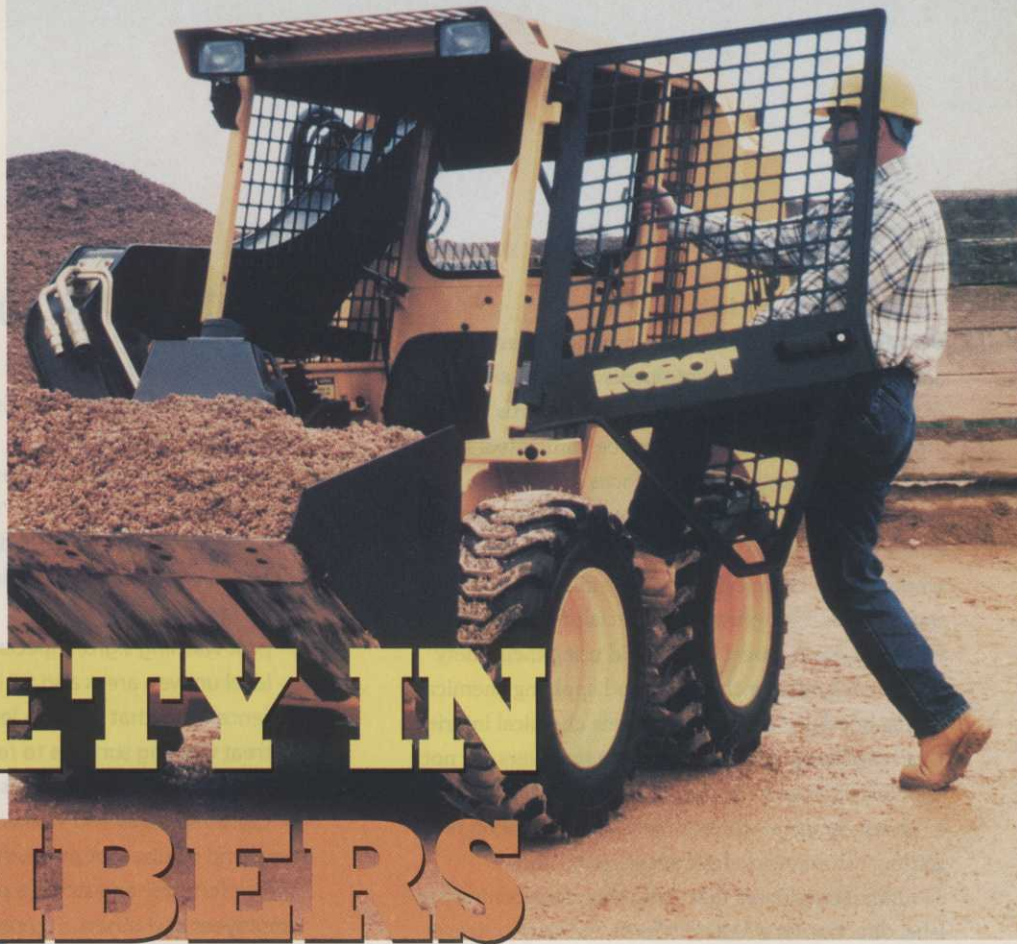


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SAFETY IN NUMBERS



**Workers' comp rates too high?
These tips may help you and your
crews operate more safely while
you cut your insurance costs**

BY BOB DECKER & ANDREW J. MAUSCHBAUGH

How much are your workers' compensation claims costing? Keeping your employees safe makes sense — and saves dollars. In fact, according to the National Safety Council, U.S. companies lost over \$127.7 billion in workers' compensation claims in 1998. But by correcting unsafe conditions on your property and teaching safe equipment operating practices to your crew members, you can reduce costly lawsuits and unnecessary damage to your business.

During the last 100 years, loss control representatives at our firm have inspected thousands of landscape operations. They have found that the most common office workplace hazards are those that would seem to be the most obvious (see sidebar on page 50).

Leading safety hot buttons

Because landscape contracting, grounds maintenance and chemical lawn care employees perform a variety of tasks, there are several areas where hazards and hazardous operating procedures can be eliminated. Here are two of the key practices to focus on:

Improper chemical protective gear — Make sure your employees wear the proper protective gear when working with chemicals, especially in their concentrated forms. Loss prevention specialists say the time when employees most often avoid using their safety gear is while mixing chemicals and applying chemicals during hot days. To avoid employee chemical injuries,

- ▶ arrange spray schedules so your employees are not applying chemicals during the hottest part of the day,
- ▶ check chemical labels for specific information regarding recommended protective gear, and
- ▶ remind employees that using chemicals contrary to label directions is a federal offense and may endanger their health.



Make training for safe and proper equipment use a priority.

Inadequate machine guards and power equipment safety practices — While it has been said that “familiarity breeds contempt,” it may be more accurate to say that “familiarity breeds carelessness” in the case of power equipment used daily in many landscaping operations. That’s why it is important that your employees keep safety measures in mind all the time to avoid injuries and costly workers’ compensation claims.

To protect your employees from serious injury or death resulting from contact with moving machine parts, check regularly to see that all power equipment

On-site risks to avoid

Based on the observations of loss control specialists, we’ve listed three of the most common office site risk factors, along with advice on how to correct potential problems.

1. Wet surfaces/floors. Uneven surfaces, walks, holes and changes in level are major sources of “slip and fall” injuries, both indoors and outdoors. Wet areas made slick by frequent watering and algae growth are also a problem. To cut down on the possibility of these injuries,

- ▶ post warning signs, especially in slippery areas,
- ▶ level uneven areas and fill in holes,
- ▶ fence areas that can’t be leveled,
- ▶ treat walking surfaces to reduce algae growth and
- ▶ routinely inspect walkways.

2. Cluttered aisles and walkways. Hoses left in walkways, as well as trees and shrubs that protrude, are tripping hazards. Bags of seed and/or fertilizer and storage pallets also present safety hazards for employees and others. To prevent these types of injuries, you should:

- ▶ check walkways on a daily basis to be sure they are clear of obstacles,
- ▶ be certain hanging items above walkways and doorways are secure and out of reach, and
- ▶ make sure tool storage areas are secure (tools don’t protrude).

3. Poor electrical wiring. Poor wiring is one of the biggest causes of fires. The most common electrical violations found are temporary wiring situations, excessive use of extension cords (including those made of “Romex” wiring) and improper splicing. To prevent the possibility of an electrical fire, heed the following advice:

- ▶ Have your electrical system inspected by a professional electrician
- ▶ Join wires by standard twist connectors. Wires that are twisted together can loosen and arc, which generates heat and more arcing, potentially causing a fire
- ▶ Check extension cords to make sure they are of an adequate capacity for the load they are carrying
- ▶ Do not place extension cords under carpets: Cords can break down from constant foot traffic and can smolder undetected, potentially causing a large fire
- ▶ Never plug one extension cord into another extension cord
- ▶ Be certain that all joints are inside a junction or receptacle box
- ▶ Keep breaker and service boxes away from wet walls and protect them from leaks



Additional eye protection would increase the safety of this task.

is properly guarded. Make training for safe and proper equipment use a priority. If employees think you're just giving it lip service, they might cut corners and alter equipment safety guards.

If a guard is removed from a piece of machinery to change a belt or make an adjustment, replace it immediately. Do not allow employees to bypass or remove machine guards when using equipment. Conduct regular equipment evaluations to see that all guards are present and damage-free.

Equipment danger zones

While the equipment used by landscape installation, lawn care and maintenance operations varies, many types have similar danger points such as those that follow. Specific practices for landscape equipment also follow.

Fans — Ventilation and engine fans can be some of the most common safety hazards if not properly guarded. The fan blades, fly wheel and pulley system must be protected to prevent accidental contact. Do this with a protective screen with openings no larger than 1/2 in. All circulating fans should have guards installed that prevent fingers from contacting the fan blades and/or motor. Older fans with guards that have openings larger than 1/2 in. should be retrofitted with smaller guards or replaced.

Machine parts — Air compressors, sprayers and similar machines also require protective guards. All V-belts on air compressors and sprayers, whether fixed or portable, should be enclosed. Watch especially for blades and protective guards on any chipper/shredder. Specialty equipment like log splitters have parts that must be guarded or kept free for safe operation.

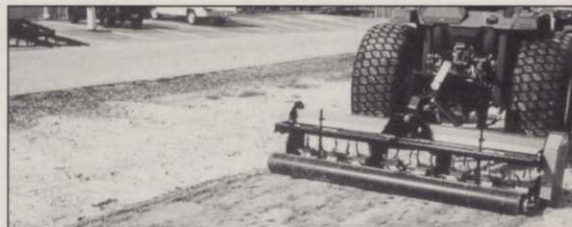
Trucks and other vehicles — Proper training is vital in the operation of on-road equipment such as trucks, vans, tractors, forklifts, tree spades and bobcats. OSHA requires that only trained and authorized personnel operate this type of machinery. Most landscape managers do not permit an employee without a driver's license to

continued on page 50



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1

The precision of a steering wheel, and front-mounted offset mower deck lets the F735 run circles around zero-turning-radius mowers when trimming.

3

The diesel F735, and gas F725 feature hydraulic deck lifts to clear curbs and other obstacles.

4

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New 60-inch 7-Iron deck
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Every John Deere Front Mower (except for 1600 Wide-Area Mower) is designed with a unique geometry that ensures the rear of the machine stays within the cutting arc when turning. This permits these machines to trim closely but never run over flowerbeds, for instance.



5

Twin Touch® two-pedal control (found on all John Deere front mowers) works with the natural motion of your foot, and allows instantaneous direction changes.

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A high-torque, liquid-cooled 20.5-hp Yanmar diesel engine and shaft-driven 60-inch 7-Iron™ seven-gauge stamped steel deck make it the most powerful mower of its kind.

Hydraulic weight transfer and a foot-operated differential kick in extra traction on inclines and slippery ground. Precise power steering and Twin Touch® two-pedal control allow instant and effortless direction changes. A tight turning radius, and compact layout ensure the rear stays within the cutting arc — perfect for cutting sculpted landscapes.

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Interested in the affordable diesel F735 (or its gas-powered counterpart, the 20-hp F725)? Stop by your local John Deere dealer (call 1-800-537-8233 for one near you). You'll be on cloud nine.

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continued from page 47

operate any mobile equipment. Many states do not allow anyone under age 18 to operate power equipment. Follow your state's regulations.

Mowers — Mowers are so common that they are often overlooked as a safety haz-



Safe employees are more productive employees.

ard. Most new mowers have the required guards, but many older ones do not. All mowers should have a self-closing guard for the emptying chute. Side chute mowers should have a guard at the rear to prevent the mower from rolling back over the operator's feet. All new mowers have a lever as part of the handle that will automatically stop the blade and/or motor when released. Older mowers without this feature should be replaced.

Tractors — The power take-off must be properly guarded. Establish and enforce a

company policy that prohibits employees from riding mobile equipment unless they are sitting on the seat provided by the manufacturer. Prohibit additional riders on equipment.

Skid steers — Crews working rapidly may forget that a skid steer should never exceed the rated capacity — this is 1/2 of the listed tipping load.

Aerial lifts — Check all controls each time

before using, and never use the lift if the basket controls are not operational. Don't forget to attach the safety harness.

Chain saws — Never operate a chain saw with a damaged hand guard. Check that the chain is sharp and chain tension is neither too tight nor too loose. Wear eye protection and safety clothing.

Edgers & line trimmers — Wear eye protection with these products and do not operate if they are missing guards. When operating, be careful of bystanders.

Ensuring that workers' compensation insurance is in force at all times can go a long way to protect your business.

If you're not sure as to whether your business is properly protected, ask your insurance company to conduct a loss control survey

— Bob Decker is assistant vice president of loss control and Andrew J. Mauschbaugh is loss control engineering manager for Florists' Mutual Insurance Co., which has been serving the floral/horticultural industry for over 110 years. They can be contacted at 800/851-7740 or www.floristsmutual.com.

Safe operation's big seven

The Outdoor Power Equipment Institute recommends several key steps to operate any piece of outdoor power equipment at any location. Make sure your employees run through this checklist with every use:

1. Keep children and pets away from operating equipment.
2. Handle gas and fuel/oil mixtures carefully.
3. Never operate equipment unattended; turn off engine and disconnect spark plug before attempting to unclog or repair equipment
4. Clear work areas from rocks, toys, large debris, etc. before using
5. Dress properly for the job (long pants, close-fitting clothes, safety glasses, safety boots, tucked-in hair and no loose jewelry).
6. Keep hands and feet away from moving parts. This sounds elementary but people forget to turn off equipment before working on it.
7. Understand how to operate the equipment. Follow manufacturers' directions, get training on proper operation and follow safety instructions.

For more information on safe operation of outdoor power equipment, contact OPEI at 703/549-7600.

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