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FATALITIES RESULTING FROM TREE-RELATED WORK ACCIDENTS IN 2009

Source: Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA)

22

The number of workers killed by a falling tree or tree limb

17

The number of workers who died after falling from a tree

14

The number of workers who died from electric shock

9

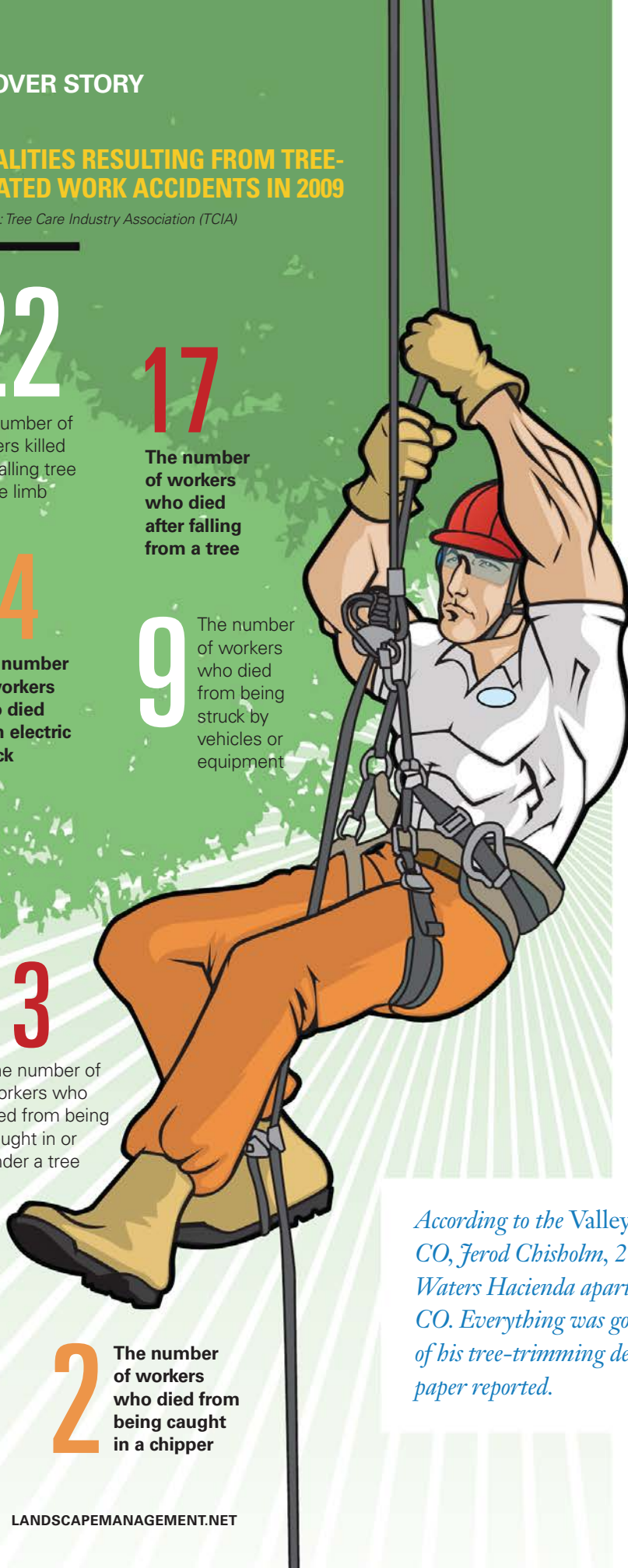
The number of workers who died from being struck by vehicles or equipment

3

The number of workers who died from being caught in or under a tree

2

The number of workers who died from being caught in a chipper



continued from page 30

Tree care a risky profession

The young man was discovered unconscious in his trimming unit's bucket (see anecdote below). Paramedics performed CPR on Chisolm for more than half an hour before he was pronounced dead, the paper reported.

Tree care is routinely listed among the top five most dangerous professions in the world. Preliminary 2010 Bureau of Labor statistics show that fatal work injuries involving forestry, farming and fishing rose by 9% in 2010, while fatalities among logging workers specifically also increased, from 36 in 2009 to 59.

Ninety percent of all accidents can be attributed to unsafe behaviors, asserts Peter Gerstenberger, senior adviser for safety compliance and standards at the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA).

Gerstenberger runs a certified tree care safety program at TCIA, an association for commercial tree care companies that strives to reduce accidents and improve worker safety.

Dangers usually emerge when tree care veterans — not new workers — become overconfident, Gerstenberger says.

Dave Marren, vice president of safety and regulatory affairs for Bartlett Tree Experts, agrees.

“Workers must remember that you can do something right 99.9% of the time and that .1%, that one day at 11 o'clock in the morning on that oak tree, you can make a mistake and get hurt.”

According to the Valley Courier newspaper in Alamosa, CO, Jerod Chisolm, 25, was trimming trees at the Blue Waters Hacienda apartment complex in Saguache County, CO. Everything was going great, that is until the arm of his tree-trimming device touched an electrical line, the paper reported.



Workers operate a wood chipper.

Of those deaths, 22 workers were struck by a tree or tree limb when removing trees; 17 fell from trees; 14 died from electric shock; 9 were struck by vehicles or equipment; and the remainder were incited by various other causes, such as chipper accidents and asphyxiation.

One big problem is that smaller

At Bartlett, if an employee commits the same infraction twice he or she is fired. Some infractions, such as not being tied in when working above ground, are one strike and you're out.

"We're not playing baseball," Marren says.

Training key to preventing accidents

Marren oversees all of Bartlett's safety and compliance programs, and Bartlett's is among the most intensive safety training programs in the industry. It operates a state-of-the-art, 400-acre facility dedicated solely to safety. Workers attend 50- to 60-hour safety courses covering everything from rigging to cabling.

"We go out and actually apply techniques with seasoned instructors and look at the pros and cons of each type of system," Marren says. "It's more than, 'OK, we've told you the right way to do it. You're on your own.' You have to make it part of their behavior."

"It's like learning how to drive," adds Dane Buell, director of general tree care at SavATree. "You're more careful when you're first starting out."

Inspired to modify SavATree's safety policy after attending a tree conference last winter, Buell says SavATree is now revising its safety policy, focusing more on injury prevention.

It already holds a monthly safety-related conference call, where its safety committee discusses accidents, near misses and how they can be prevented going forward.

The TCIA compiles information on all arbor-related accidents reported in the media. The association's most recent data show that in 2009, 89 fatalities were reported.

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COVER STORY

companies aren't always aware of hazards or don't have the resources to address them, Gerstenberger says, and workers often have accidents because they have no training.

He should know; he worked in tree care for 10 years. "In a sense I am a poster child for what I'm talking about," he says. During those 10 years,

he suffered minor injuries, which happened because his company didn't provide safety training.

Hefty price to pay for injuries

When Moore recalls the mowing accident in which his employee lost part of his finger, he bristles when he thinks of the cost, not only to the man

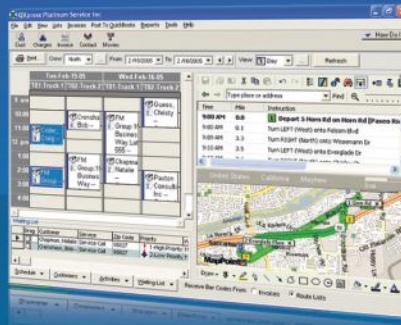
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—DANE BUELL
DIRECTOR OF GENERAL TREE CARE,
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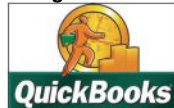
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but also to the company.

"It's unfortunate, but at the same time workers don't understand that it costs the company a lot of money, because as your insurance claims rise, your premiums go up." And when rates rise, they stay that way for three years, he says.

The last major claim ELM had was 15 years ago, Moore says. An employee who was pruning fell off a ladder, twisted his knee and needed two surgeries.

"It was well over \$150,000 that the insurance company paid," Moore says. "Our rates went up 15% just from that one accident. In today's market you could lose your insurance altogether."

Simple accidents, even an emergency room visit, can cost a company several thousand dollars, Moore adds.

It's crucial to have a hefty insurance plan, as Green Lawn does, says Knopsnyder. "If you're not insured, it's just a bad accident waiting to happen and it's bad for everybody in the business.

"When a company doesn't follow the rules we all get lumped into that. It's not good."

Insurance "is a big deal," says SavATree's Buell, "but the trick to having competitive insurance rates is to reduce your losses. It's like the stock market. You buy low and sell high."

Hearing stories like those of a 32-year-old weed-whacker who got too close to the street and was killed by a car in a hit-and-run accident always hits home, Gerstenberger says.

Such stories are stark reminders that no worker is immune to tragedy.

"The majority of the accidents happen to people who have been on the job for years," Estrada says. "They feel like they can do it with their eyes closed, and they can't." **LM**



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THE BENCHMARK

KEVIN KEHOE

The author, owner-manager of 3PG Consulting, is a 25-year industry veteran. Reach him at kkehoe@questex.com.

Build a sales machine

In the old days, the phone rang and there was more business than we could handle. Yeah, I really miss the old days, too. But we aren't likely to see them again for at least five years — or until the real estate market heals.

All that being said, it is essential to build a sales machine within your business. There are five parts of a well-functioning sales machine:

1. Your **plan** must address the volumes required to achieve a return on investment.
2. Your **pricing** must be competitive enough to win a fair share of what you bid.
3. Your sales **people** must be able to execute the plan — weekly.
4. Your **methods** must make it easy for your team to focus on the primary objective: maximum face time with prospects.
5. Your **message** must resonate in the prospect's gut. (*Hint: Their primary need is not for higher quality landscape*).

More on the message

Your message must demonstrate an understanding of the prospect's core needs. Only after this has occurred can you offer solutions. The prospect's needs are both logical and emotional, but are always driven by business considerations.

Let's use an example of primary needs in the commercial maintenance services arena. The following message:

- › demonstrates an understanding of the prospect's world;
- › suggests (not provides) potential solutions; and
- › provides a common platform for print media, advertising, marketing, emails, proposals and sales calls.

When you consider the following challenges you face, selecting the right company to achieve your business goals becomes more than a matter of a green lawn.

Supply and Demand: Vacancies for commercial space over the next five years are expected to increase by 10% in our market. This put pressure on rents and retention. When you consider that retention is driven by rental rates, and rental rates are driven by good management and curb appeal, it makes sense to fashion a maintenance services strategy that gets you the best return on investment.

Energy Cost: The cost of energy and water are expected to rise by 20% by 2012. Combining this with pressure on rents, property managers can ill afford to waste water or continue to invest in high energy-consuming landscapes. It makes sense to assess these costs and invest in necessary upgrades to save money.

Litigation: The primary sources of litigation stem from issues regarding accidents related to poor maintenance practices — 70% of which are outside the building where people come to and from the office. Mitigation can involve line of sight, lighting, water/snow slip-and-fall, and damages from maintenance equipment and contractors. When you consider the probability of these events, a prevention plan can save you plenty.

Weather: Storms cost property owners more than \$400 million in our market last year. The greatest threats stem from windblown trees, hail damage to walls and structures, and poor drainage because of outdated landscape design. These are high-cost insurance items that can be addressed by low-cost landscape practices. Managing this annual reality has a direct impact on your annual revenue.

This is a sales message. It is directed at the real needs of the commercial property manager in this particular market. It is the way you get in the door to become a contender instead of just a bidder. Everyone has problems these days, and the problems are all money problems. Sell your services as a solution to these problems, and the prospect will listen.

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P R O V E N S O L U T I O N S



AT A GLANCE

COMPANY: Lawn Dawg, Nashua, NH

FOUNDED: 1997

TITLE: President

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY: 28

INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT: Former president of PLCAA and the Massachusetts Association of Lawn Care Professionals (MALCP); PLANET member and Trailblazer.

SERVICE AREA: Northeast United States

NUMBER OF LOCATIONS: 8

EMPLOYEES: 72

SERVICES: Lawn and tree/shrub care

HOBBIES: Spending time with family, playing golf and being an avid Red Sox fan

FAMILY: Wife, Oana, and children Joe, Sam and Bianca

WEBSITE: LawnDawg.com

Jim Campanella started as a technician for Old Fox Lawn Care nearly 30 years. He moved into management with a variety of companies in the Northeast before deciding to set out on his own. “At that time, I decided that I had learned all the tools I needed to start my own company,” he says. Today, he’s the president and owner of Lawn Dawg.

How did you come up with Lawn Dawg as a name? I knew I wanted something different in the name, logo, colors and the features and benefits of the services I offered. While working for Barefoot Grass, we had a softball team we called The Lawn Dogs, so I changed the spelling of Dog to Dawg, developed a logo that was friendly and distinguishable, and built my offerings based on all of the things customers told me that they did and didn’t like about lawn services.

You’ve been involved in the industry, as a former president of the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA, now part of PLANET). Why is that important to you? Prior to starting Lawn Dawg, I had the great fortune of working for legends of this industry — including Jim Wilkinson, Marty Erbaugh, Pat Norton and Bill Hoopes. The mentoring I received from them helped me get to where I am today.

I joined PLCAA in 1998 with the desire to give my support to the next generation of leaders, just as those guys did for me. Over the years, I have developed so many friends

from all over the country, thanks to my involvement with PLCAA and PLANET.

You’ve expressed frustration with the way legislators approach lawn care issues. What can — and should — be done about it?

I’ve seen bad legislation passed or considered that has no scientific foundation. Emotion plays a huge factor in how bills get introduced, gain momentum and get passed. Our activist opponents are very engaged with legislators, and are constantly providing misleading and outright false information. They have been better organized than us, and have really kept us on the defensive. Of course, they have the advantage of performing their activism full time. Lawn care operators are busy running businesses, creating jobs, stimulating the economy and providing a beneficial contribution to the environment and the quality of life of our customers.

Have you been able to influence any legislation?

In 2010, I lost a lot of sleep: A representative in New Hampshire introduced a bill that would eliminate the use of pesticides on lawns. The first public hearing was like a circus, as the activists systematically introduced people to testify that pesticides have in some way devastated their lives. They brought people from New York, Massachusetts, Washington, Maine and Canada, including a few self-proclaimed “experts.” Watching the reaction of the committee members made it clear to me we were in for a battle. Over the next nine months I attended about half a dozen committee meetings — and with the support of the National Pest Management Association (NPMA), Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE), PLANET and several industry suppliers, we were able to defeat the bill.

What challenges and opportunities do you see for the industry in the coming year?

We will continue to face the challenges that we’ve been facing in recent years, such as legislative activity, rising product costs, rising fuel costs, rising labor costs, and an economy that doesn’t allow for price increases.

“**THE MENTORING I RECEIVED FROM (INDUSTRY LEADERS) HELPED ME GET TO WHERE I AM TODAY.**”

THE PICTURE *of* HEALTH



AN 11-STORY HOSPITAL is rising in Escondido, CA, located in hot, arid and drought-prone San Diego County. Instead of traditional lush green lawns and plantings, the landscape will feature California native plants, decomposed granite pathways, stone and boulders found onsite and swales that allow storm water to infiltrate the ground instead of run off into storm drains.

“The industry and society are steering toward environmentally friendly landscaping,” says John Mohns, president and owner of Benchmark Landscape, which is installing the project. “Even though in the past, people loved their tropical oases and green lawns, things are changing — and landscape architects and property owners are responding to that.”

The landscaping includes installing bioswales for water runoff.

Behind the scenes at the environmentally friendly landscaping work for a new California hospital. BY JANET AIRD

Mohns founded the company in 1984, in Poway, near San Diego. Benchmark’s landscape installation clients are mostly general contractors, he says, but much of its client base is in the commercial maintenance department. He’s opened branch offices in San Marcos and Spring Valley, which are also in San Diego County — mainly for the maintenance division to be closer to the properties they work on.

Benchmark has approximately 260 employees, with

roughly 220 in the field.

“As a company, I think our managers have a passion for the environment, landscaping, plants and irrigation and drainage systems that function like they should,” Mohns says. “We’ve gotten very good at value engineering. We have some tremendous talent, and we have some good ideas.”

The hospital, Palomar Pomerado Health, is on a 4- to 5-acre site, says Benchmark’s general manager, Bill Hoffman. At a cost of approximately \$3 million, the landscaping project is

SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPE

one of the largest Benchmark has been involved with, and is one of the largest in the country. It began in the spring of 2011, and has a completion date of mid-2012. San Diego-based Spurlock Poirier Landscape Architects designed the landscaping.

“They’re very involved onsite,” Hoffman says of the design team. “We’re working closely with the architect relating to plant procurement, plant layout, and site and design issues.”

One of the challenges is the sheer size of the site. Another is that the hospital is still under construction. With so many people on the job, there’s almost a little village of offices to administer and manage the various trades onsite, Mohns says. Benchmark has a project manager onsite full time, and has 12 to 20 employees in small sub-crews working in multiple areas. Scheduling and coordination among all the trades is probably the biggest challenge, he says.

“It’s amazing what it takes for everyone to do their jobs, and do their jobs efficiently,” he adds. “We have to work on a very tight schedule to make sure we can get into areas that are open for us. Other areas, we coordinate with other trades. There are some areas on the project — for example, the bioswales — where we have to work on Saturdays because that’s a day when no cars are parked there.”

The bioswales, at the edges of the parking lots, the perimeter of the site and other impervious surfaces, are the main storm water features in the project: Storm water will flow into them from the impervious surfaces.

As storm water infiltrates the ground, plant material, mulch and soil will filter out pollutants such as sediment and hydrocarbons. During large rain events, runoff may pond or flow in the swales, but it won’t work its way offsite. Instead, it will empty into surface drains at the lower part of the swales, Hoffman says, noting, “It’s amazing the effort that’s gone into treating the storm water.”

Bioswales collect and filter water before it enters storm drains.



Reduce, reuse, recycle

Another sustainable feature of the project is the reuse of materials already on the site. Benchmark will excavate the swales 3.5 ft. deep, and then replace some of the excavated soil with a mixture of soil from elsewhere on the site. They’ll use 3- to 8-in. aggregate from onsite for the mulch and bring in the remainder from elsewhere. They’ll landscape the swales with trees, drought-tolerant plants, and 2- to 4-ft. landscape boulders that were already on the site, as well.

“They’re absolutely gorgeous boulders,” Mohns says. “There’s a lot of beauty in things that in the past might have been thrown away.”

They’ll also use boulders from the site to build rock walls that designate main entrances and exits, driveways and other focal points. The boulders retain the soil on slopes, they’re natural — and they don’t need water, Mohns points out.

“In landscaping, a lot of thought can go into how you cover the ground, especially on a slope,” he says. “The landscape architect was very involved in laying these out. We’re working with them to ensure that their design is implemented.”

The landscaping includes other sustainable features as well, says Hoffman. The entire site is being capped with approximately 3 ft. of clean dirt that was excavated when the site was leveled. The decomposed granite pathways also

allow storm water to infiltrate into the ground. The benches are being made of Ipê wood from sustainable forests, and the landscape mulches in most of the planter areas are organic.

The main garden is the healing garden, which is designed to be an area of meditation and peace of mind. It will be surrounded by other gardens that also will be designed to be calming and restful — and drought-tolerant. San Diego is just emerging from a Level 2 drought that began in 2009, and designers are choosing plant palettes with water efficiency in mind.

“The challenge right now is finding enough of the right plants,” Hoffman says. “Typically, a good nursery is actively managing its stock, planting, moving its stock up as it matures, fertilizing and pruning. The recession depleted the available quality plant material stock. It definitely takes more time and effort to locate good plant material in the quantities we will need.”

Benchmark is buying blocks of plants and contracting with nurseries to grow them. If there aren’t enough, Spurlock Poirier will make substitutions or specify smaller plants.

“We have a very strong team out there,” Mohns says. “In the end, it will be a very successful job and a beautiful job.” **LMI**

The author is based in Altadena, CA.