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Safety NEWSLETTER

Grounds & Facilities Safety







Everyday Work. Changing Conditions. Real Risks.

County employees who maintain buildings, grounds, parks, recreational areas, roadsides, parking lots, and other public properties perform an incredibly wide variety of work.

On any given day, employees may operate mowers and utility vehicles, use hand and power tools, trim vegetation, move materials, work from ladders, maintain buildings, load trailers, operate tractors or other equipment, interact with the public, and respond to changing weather conditions.

Because these activities are so common, it can be easy to view them as routine. But routine work can still involve significant risk.

The goal is not to make everyday tasks complicated. It is to recognize where employees can be injured and put practical safeguards in place before the work begins.

October Brings Changing Conditions

Leaves can hide holes, curbs, pavement defects, drainage structures, and other hazards. Wet leaves can become extremely slippery. Daylight hours become shorter, temperatures fluctuate, and early frost may create unexpected icy areas.

Fall is also an important time to prepare equipment and facilities for winter operations.

This may include inspecting snow-removal equipment, identifying plowing hazards before they are covered by snow, checking lighting, reviewing winter PPE, preparing emergency supplies, and addressing drainage or pavement issues before freezing weather arrives.

Preparation performed now can prevent problems later when employees are working during difficult winter conditions.

Take a Few Seconds Before Starting the Job

Before beginning work, consider five simple questions:

- What can hurt me or someone nearby?
- Is the equipment appropriate for the task and in good safe condition?
- Do I have the correct tools and my PPE?
- Have the work environment or conditions changed?
- Is there a better and safer way to perform the task?

Safety does not have to be complicated. Often, the most effective safety practices are simply good planning, properly maintained equipment, appropriate training, communication, and employees being willing to stop when something does not look right.

Start With the Work Being Performed



One of the most effective ways to improve safety is to look at the actual task.

An employee may spend part of the morning mowing, then load equipment onto a trailer, use a string trimmer, move landscaping materials, and later assist with building maintenance. Each activity presents different hazards.

Before beginning a task, employees and supervisors should consider the equipment being used, the work environment, nearby employees or members of the public, weather conditions, and anything unusual about the job that day.

A few moments spent identifying the hazard before beginning work can prevent an injury that affects an employee for weeks, months, or even longer.

Equipment Safety Begins Before the Engine Starts

Mowers, tractors, UTVs, skid steers, utility vehicles, trailers, powered hand tools, and other equipment are valuable tools - but only when they are in safe operating condition.

Employees should perform appropriate inspections before use and report damaged or malfunctioning equipment. Guards, shields, seat belts, rollover protection systems, lights, alarms, tires, brakes, controls, and other safety features should be maintained and used as intended.

Equipment should never be operated simply because “it worked yesterday.”

Operators should also understand the limitations of the equipment they are using. Slopes, wet grass, uneven terrain, hidden holes, curbs, drop-offs, soft shoulders, overhead obstructions, and pedestrians can quickly change an otherwise routine task.

One important rule applies across nearly every type of equipment:

If something becomes jammed, clogged, damaged, or requires adjustment, stop the equipment and control the hazardous energy before placing hands or other body parts into the danger area.

Trying to save a few minutes by clearing equipment while it is still energized can result in a life-changing injury.

Slips, Trips & Falls Can Happen Anywhere

Falls are not limited to ladders or elevated work.

Wet grass, leaves, mud, snow, ice, hoses, extension cords, tools, uneven sidewalks, curbs, trailers, truck beds, and building entrances can all create fall hazards.

Employees should maintain good housekeeping, keep walking areas clear, wear footwear appropriate for the conditions, and correct hazards when practical rather than simply working around them.

Ladders deserve particular attention. Employees should select the correct ladder for the task, inspect it before use, maintain proper positioning, and avoid overreaching.

Whenever an employee is tempted to stand on a chair, bucket, equipment attachment, truck bumper, or other improvised surface to gain "just a little more height," the safest decision is usually to stop and obtain the proper equipment.

Protect Yourself From the Work Environment



Grounds, parks, and maintenance employees frequently work outdoors and may be exposed to heat, cold, lightning, insects, ticks, poison ivy, poor air quality, noise, dust, chemicals, and other environmental conditions.

Personal protective equipment is important, but it should be selected based on the actual exposure.

Depending on the task, protection may include safety glasses, face shields, hearing protection, gloves, high-visibility clothing, protective footwear, chainsaw protective equipment, respiratory protection, or other specialized PPE.

Employees should understand not only **what** PPE is required, but **why** it is needed and when it must be replaced.

Environmental conditions can also change during the workday. A task that was safe at 8:00 a.m. may present different risks later because of heat, rain, wind, lightning, reduced visibility, or changing public activity.

Working Around the Public Requires Extra Awareness

Parks, recreational facilities, sidewalks, parking lots, public buildings, and other properties often remain occupied while maintenance work is being performed.

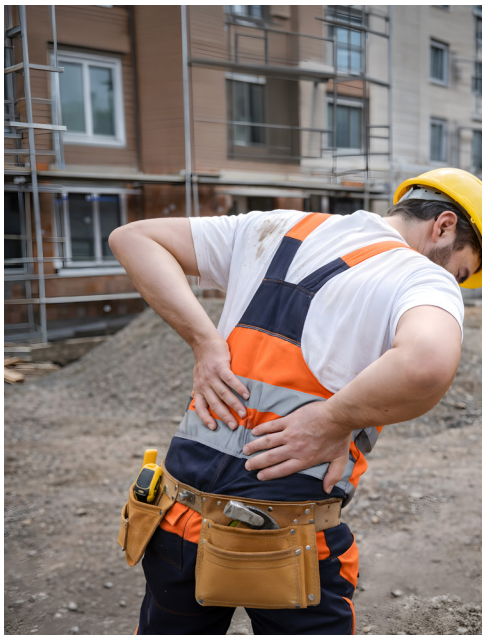
Children, pedestrians, bicyclists, vehicles, pets, event participants, and visitors may enter work areas unexpectedly.

Employees operating equipment should continuously scan their surroundings and anticipate that members of the public may not recognize the hazards associated with the work.

Where appropriate, cones, barricades, signs, spotters, temporary closures, or other controls should be used to separate people from the work activity.

The objective is not only to protect employees, but also to prevent employees from being placed in situations where they must react suddenly to protect someone else.

Material Handling: Let the Equipment Do the Work



Strains and sprains can occur when employees lift, carry, push, pull, or move objects that are heavy, awkward, or difficult to control.

Rather than relying solely on lifting technique, consider whether the task can be changed.

Carts, dollies, lift tables, ramps, hoists, mechanical lifting equipment, trailers, and other material-handling tools can often reduce physical stress much more effectively than simply reminding employees to "lift with their legs."

Employees should ask for assistance when needed and avoid attempting a lift simply because they have successfully performed it before.

The safest lift may be the lift the employee does not have to perform manually.

Everyone Should Go Home Safely

Grounds, building maintenance, parks and recreation, and similar operations provide essential services that keep public properties safe, functional, and accessible.

The work may look different from one department to another, but the principle remains the same:

Understand the task. Identify the hazards. Use the right equipment. Protect yourself and the people around you.

A strong safety culture is built through thousands of everyday decisions—and those decisions matter.

Interested in Additional Training?

MCWCF offers an onsite **Safety Academy** specifically designed for employees working in grounds maintenance, building maintenance, parks and recreation, and similar operations.

Training topics can include equipment inspections, PPE, mower and UTV safety, tractors, trailers, hand and power tools, environmental hazards, fall protection, ladders, aerial lifts, heavy equipment, snow plowing, chainsaws, rigging, incident reporting, emergency response, and other applicable subjects.

Academy content can be tailored to the needs of participating members.

If your organization is interested in hosting an onsite Safety Academy, please feel free to contact MCWCF to learn more.

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