

Safety **NEWSLETTER**

Spring Safety Readiness: **County Employee Safety During Park Preparation Season**

As temperatures rise and the natural world begins to awaken, counties across the state shift their attention to one of the most anticipated seasonal tasks - reopening county parks for public use. From hiking trails to canoe launches, county employees play a vital role in ensuring these spaces are safe, clean, and welcoming for the public.

However, behind the scenes, the work required to prepare these parks for warmer months involves a range of high-risk activities. Without proper planning, training, and protective measures, these springtime duties can result in preventable injuries and incidents.

This article outlines the most common risks faced by parks and public works staff during seasonal park preparation, along with best practices counties can adopt to keep their teams safe.

Common Spring Hazards Faced by County Workers

Preparing parks for springtime use requires extensive physical labor, environmental awareness, and the use of heavy equipment and power tools. The work can be complicated by soft or uneven terrain, lingering winter damage, and time pressures to open park amenities quickly.

Key Risk Areas Include:

- **Trail Clearing and Tree Removal**
 - Hazards from falling limbs, unstable trees, and operating chainsaws or pole saws
 - Trip and fall hazards due to debris, mud, and uneven ground
 - Exposure to poison ivy, ticks, and other environmental irritants
- **Use of Bucket Trucks and Aerial Lifts**
 - Fall risks for workers elevated above ground
 - Equipment instability on soggy or soft spring terrain
 - Contact hazards with overhead power lines or tree limbs
- **Ground Maintenance: Mowing, Trimming, and Blowing**
 - Risks of flying debris causing eye and skin injuries
 - Noise-induced hearing loss from prolonged exposure to loud equipment
 - Musculoskeletal strain from prolonged use of vibration-heavy tools
- **Powered Hand Tools and Maintenance Equipment**
 - Injuries such as cuts, punctures, and burns
 - Electrical hazards, especially when operating tools near wet areas
 - Improper tool use due to lack of training or equipment malfunction
- **Waterway Clearing (Ponds, Rivers, and Lakes)**
 - Slip and fall hazards along banks and in canoes/kayaks
 - Drowning risk during water-based tasks without proper PPE
 - Contaminants or wildlife exposure in stagnating waterways
- **Vehicle and Trailer Use**
 - Loading/unloading equipment improperly
 - Maneuvering trailers on narrow or unpaved park roads
 - Backing up vehicles in areas with poor visibility

Best Practices for a Safe Spring Start-Up

To minimize injuries and promote a culture of safety, counties should establish structured protocols and training. Especially when utilizing part-time or volunteer staff.

Recommended Best Practices:

- **Conduct Job Hazard Analyses (JHAs):**
 - Evaluate each task and identify potential risks, required PPE, and safe procedures.
 - Document and review findings with all staff involved in seasonal work.
- **Update or Create Standard Operating Procedures:**
 - Ensure all tools, equipment, and maintenance processes have up-to-date safety protocols.
 - Include guidelines for aerial lift use, powered hand tools, and trail clearing.
- **Implement Comprehensive Safety Training:**
 - Offer training sessions specific to spring hazards, equipment operation, and emergency response.
 - Provide train-the-trainer resources for long-term knowledge sustainability.
- **Use a Training Matrix to Track Staff Readiness:**
 - Match job roles with required and recommended training.
 - Track certifications, refresher needs, and recertification deadlines.
- **Inspect All Equipment Before Use:**
 - Check mowers, trimmers, chainsaws, and lifts for damage or maintenance needs.
 - Replace or repair worn-out equipment before deployment.
- **Provide and Enforce PPE Use:**
 - Require gloves, eye protection, hearing protection, high-visibility clothing, and fall protection.
 - Include life vests for any water-based tasks.
- **Establish a Communication Plan:**
 - Use radios or phones to maintain contact with remote teams.
 - Implement check-in/check-out systems for isolated work areas.
- **Plan for Emergency Response:**
 - Ensure teams know how to respond to injuries, wildlife encounters, or environmental hazards.
 - Keep first-aid kits and emergency numbers accessible.



Supporting County Employees with Proactive Safety Systems

To support these efforts, counties should consider developing formal safety systems that include:

- A **Risk Register** to document ongoing and emerging hazards
- Facility- and equipment-specific **inspection checklists**
- A **Safety Manual** updated for real-world, seasonal conditions
- An **employee-to-safety department feedback loop** to report concerns and suggestions

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