

SAFETY

and potential liabilities for sports turf managers

WORKING AT BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY (BYU) we use mostly university students to help us do our jobs. We employ 350 to 400 students from May to October and employ 100 to 150 students from November to April. On average a student works for our department for about 12 weeks, resulting in a high turnover. This requires us to have a stringent training program in place including a Safety Program; we are constantly in training mode. Even with as much training as we provide our student employees, accidents still happen.

Here is an example of a serious accident that happened on my turf crew. My crew was asked to use a Soil Reliever featuring $\frac{3}{4}$ inch solid tines on the skinned area of our softball field. We started our runs from the third base side of the infield, near the fence, and made our run to the infield edge in right field. We would back the machine up and start another run next to the just completed run, each run moving closer to the

home plate area. We had an equipment operator and a spotter to assist in backing the machine up to the fence along the third base line. On one of the runs about halfway through the job, as the machine backed up with the spotter standing directly behind it in the pinch area, the operator went to start another run but the machine was still in reverse. The consequence of the oversight was the spotter being trapped between the fence and the Soil Reliever, with resulting injuries of a broken right leg and a tine going through the instep of his left foot.

As we started the project I stayed and watched to make sure my workers doing the job correctly. I watch them make several runs and the spotter always stood to the side of the machine as it was back up for the next run, the operator had no problems in operating the tractor safely. The accident occurred when both the operator and the spotter had a lapse in judgment.

INVESTIGATION TRIGGER

The accident triggered an Occupational Safety Health Administration (OSHA) in-

vestigation. The two workers involved in the accident were questioned as was I. I had to show training records for the two individuals and we had to demonstrate that we could operate the equipment in question safely. The finding of the OSHA investigation was a \$5,000 fine levied against the BYU for having an inconsistent training program. BYU's cost for the employee's medical treatment came to about \$150,000. Could this accident have been prevented? Yes. Most accidents happen because the employee gets complacent in doing a job over and over and forgets to think about safety; instead, he thinks "It will never happen to me."

So how can we prevent accidents in the future?

Believe it or not the answer is OSHA. Why OSHA? Quoting from their website: "With the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, Congress created the OSHA to assure safe and healthful working conditions for working men and women by setting and enforcing standards and by providing training, outreach, education and assistance. OSHA's core mission is to ensure a safe and healthy workplace for every working man and woman in the Nation." Maintaining a safe workplace environment is good common sense and it's the law.

Here is a fictional case study: Let's say you have an employee suffer a work-related, serious injury. The law states you must report the accident to OSHA within 48 hours which includes Saturdays and Sundays. If you fail to report the accident on time or at all you will be



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cited and fined for the violation. After the accident is reported, OSHA, at their discretion, will investigate the accident and determine how the accident happened and what can be done to prevent the accident in the future. If you take a passive stance, meaning do very little in the way of safety in your workplace, OSHA could levy a fine against you and if the accident is serious enough your company could be fined in the 6 or 7 digit range.

On the other hand if you take a pro-active approach to safety (having an aggressive training program, keeping record of employees' training, and having regular hazard assessment programs in place) you might not receive a fine or the fine will be minimal. Also, if you are cited and you can show evidence you are implementing the suggestions OSHA has set forth, part or the whole fine can be refunded to you.

By law OSHA can come into to your workplace and inspect your safety records, make recommendations and if found inadequate levy a fine against your company. They can come onto your worksite and observe your operation; if your worksite is deemed unsafe OSHA can shut down your worksite until you have made the safety changes they have told you to make, this can also include levying a fine against your company.

SO WHAT DO YOU NEED TO DO?

First, set up and implement a good, sound Safety Program.

Second, keep detailed records of the Safety Training each employee receives and keep records of the all accidents that take place on the job no matter how small. Include on your accident form a "What do we do to prevent this accident in the future?" section on the form and implement those suggestions.

Third, implement a Hazard Assessment Program. Hazard Assessment is inspecting the work area for any potential hazards and fixing the hazards before someone actually gets injured. This is an ongoing process.

Fourth, re-evaluate your Safety Program, Hazard Assessment Program and make needed changes to your programs and then start over again. This is an ongoing process.

You might ask, "How do I do all this?" The answer is simple: go to <http://www.osha.org> and discover how to make sure your workplace is safe, secure, and OSHA-compliant.

What can OSHA provide for you?

OSHA offers online training; go to www.oshacampusonline.com/ for more information. OSHA will also come to your workplace and hold special classes for your employees on request. OSHA provides hundreds of publications available online at <http://www.osha.gov/pls/publications/publication.html>. They also provide On-Site Consultation (free of charge) to find out more go to <http://www.osha.gov/dcspl/smallbusiness/consult.html>. OSHA Offers a Compliance Assistance/Outreach Program, see http://www.osha.gov/dcspl/compliance_assistance/index.html. They also provide a section on recordkeeping, <http://www.osha.gov/recordkeeping/index.html>. These are just a few of many resources that OSHA provides.

Because OSHA oversees safety imple-

mentation for virtually everyone you may have to dig a little to find resources that relate to your situation and if all else fails you can contact OSHA directly. Go to the Contact Us section at http://www.osha.gov/html/Feed_Back.html.

If you do not have a sound safety program in place or you need to improve your existing program an OSHA representative will be happy to come to your workplace and help you set up or improve your safety program for of charge. Help is just a phone call away. ■

David Schlotthauer started working for the BYU Grounds Dept. in March of 1979. He has worked pruning trees and shrubs for 21 years and has spent the last 7 years as BYU Sports Turf Manager. David's responsibilities include the football field at Cougar Stadium, both the natural and synthetic turf at the football team's practice facilities, and over 40 acres of other fields. David also serves as the chapter president for the Intermountain Chapter of the Sports Turf Managers Association.

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