

Safety Tips of the Month

FALL 2009

How to Stay Safe During the 'Green Movement'

Some of the information in this article contributed by Joan Archibald of Old Town Fiberglass

Green Danger Signs

The ever-increasing attention given to environmental concerns, coupled with high-energy costs, has made the subjects of "green workplaces" and "green buildings" two of the hottest topics around. Anytime there is a change to the work environment, such as the myriad of changes brought on by the green movement, the potential for new safety issues and concerns must be considered.

Before the term "going green" became popular, there have been approved alternative methods and materials for homes such as buildings partially built into the sides of hills, and even straw bale construction. Depending on the layout, landscape workers must make themselves aware of any odd slopes, crevices or protrusions in the landscaped areas immediately surrounding these unique buildings, avoiding sprained ankles, bumped heads, or worse.

The Rooftop Garden

Extreme care should also be taken in and around rooftop gardens – another green phenomenon, especially in areas where yards are scarce. "Safety is supreme when installing or working around rooftop gardens," advises Joan Archibald of the Garden Resource Network. "Landscape contractors must be assured their crewmembers have been made aware of any and all dangers, and that safety procedures are developed and strictly adhered to at all times." She goes on to say, "Your crewmembers can't be afraid of heights...that's for sure."

Joan also mentioned that the contractor will need to work with a team of professionals in supporting fields, such as structural engineers, architects and Water Management persons, "...as this is high liability work. Also, waterproof your client's roof by covering it with rubberized asphalt or thermoplastic membrane to avoid roof damaged. Railings may also be required for safety," Joan cautions.

If you intend to pursue this aspect of "going green," you need to become familiar with codes and regulations in your area that permit and/or restrict such outdoor growing grounds. And remember, under no circumstance should you compromise your safety, that of your crewmembers, or that of the building's occupants. "You don't ever want to 'drop in' unannounced on someone below the garden," quips Joan.

Using Reclaimed Water and Gray Water

The use of reclaimed water and gray water are important conservation components of this green movement. With increased use in golf courses, street islands and other landscape irrigation, this water has been treated and does not present much of a risk...unless you drink it or wash with it! Don't do either!

Gray water, usually collected from sinks or showers in homes, may contain germs and bacteria and is safest when used in drip irrigation and not near people. Don't let it mist or puddle; use rubber gloves when handling it.

Strictly adhere to the regulations in your area. Improper handling or installation of a recycled or gray water system can expose your workers and passers-by to disease, and your company to big fines and litigation. "Going green" should not mean turning green after drinking from a water fountain that is inadvertently connected to a recycled or gray water system.

Beware of Asbestos

Among the products originally thought to be very helpful – but later on discovered to be very deadly – is asbestos. An excellent non-conductor of heat, asbestos was used extensively wrapping hot water pipes, in tile floors, and in the connecting and insulating of heating and air conditioning ducts.

Because of this green movement, many homeowners are moving toward more energy efficient air/heating systems. Trying to save money, some may tackle removing asbestos coated ductwork themselves, or enlist an unlicensed operator to help them. This may result in asbestos laden materials being strewn about the sides or back of the property. Teach your workers the dangers of asbestos and how to recognize it when coming onto a new work site. Best advice: stay away from it, and do not disturb it.

Composting Safety

Green advocates love to announce that they or their clients have a compost pile or bin for "natural, free fertilizing." Done correctly, composting can be an excellent way to recycle yard and kitchen waste and turn it into nutritious food for plants in the garden. Done incorrectly, it can be a source for storing or spreading germs and disease.

Tell your crews to keep dog and cat manure out of the compost pile and garden. Some of the parasites found in these manures may

survive the composting process and remain infectious for people. The application of fresh horse or steer manure in a slow compost pile or directly in the garden, can make it possible for disease-causing pathogens to contaminate garden vegetables. To reduce the risk of disease, tell your clients to allow at least 60 days between applying manure and harvesting any vegetables that will be eaten without cooking. They must also wash vegetables thoroughly before eating.

Under certain conditions, compost piles have also been known to ignite. This can happen when a very hot zone is next to a dry zone. Avoid this potential disaster by keeping the piles moist.

Keep It Green, But Keep It Safe

As landscape professionals, we need to be concerned about safety, especially in this new green environment. As we take an active role in the workplace greening process, we can also – and undoubtedly must – take the lead on initiatives that will increase the health and safety of our workforce as well as the health of our companies' bottom line.

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Joan Archibald

Safety Tips Wanted!

Do you have some safety tips that have made a difference for your company? Send them to LCIS at the address below, ATTN: Editor, and they might appear as future Safety Tips of the Month to share with your fellow CLCA members.



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