

Safety Tips of the Month

JUNE-JULY 2009

Safety in the Workplace... Then and Now

By Barbara Alvarez, LCIS Board Chair, Alvarez Landscape & Maintenance

In keeping with the 20th Anniversary theme of this issue, your Editors thought it would be worthwhile to feature for this issue's safety article, a prominent landscaper's perspective on the evolution of safety in the workplace over the last 20 years. Who better to go to for her insight into the subject than LCIS Board Chair and former CLCA State President Barbara Alvarez.

Much has happened in the area of workplace safety over the past 20 years. In no special order, here are a few changes and improvements that come to mind...

- When LCIS was founded, there was less regulation and far fewer lawsuits. Part of workplace safety has come into being because of increased litigation.
- Equipment has become much more sophisticated. Jobs that used to require walk behind rotary mowers now call for riding mowers and the use of other specialized equipment requiring extensive training in their safe operation.
- Business has become progressively more complicated the longer I am in it (and that's over 30 years). I now have to rely on more and more people to keep us safe as I expand into new types of work.

The changing demographics of our workforce has resulted in the gradual introduction of a variety of printed materials and safety training for our crewmembers that are now in Spanish. And because of the American Disabilities Act, many new policies and procedures – including when and how someone is reintroduced into our workforce after having been off work due to injury or illness – are now law.

Back when I started in business I can't remember having to have an employee handbook. Now it's the law as well. A

viable and updated Safety Program is now also a must for California employers.

The Times They Are a-Changin'

The evolution of workplace safety has caused company owners to alter their management styles in a big way. In the old days I would tell employees what to do. Now I have to *consult with* my employees and *get their feedback* to ensure that they completely understand my directives... especially on all matters relating to safety.



LCIS BOARD CHAIR Barbara Alvarez is a Past CLCA LA/SGV Chapter President, a Past State President, and is Chair of CLCA's Immigration Taskforce. She and her husband Xavier own and operate Alvarez Landscape & Maintenance based in Valinda, CA. Barbara is one of the most highly respected Green Industry professionals in the country.

In terms of regulations, these were not even on my mind when I first started in business. Now all business owners must keep up with all things OSHA and more. The good news is that, because of increased safety regulations, our businesses have evolved from unsophisticated to highly professional in a matter of a few years. Here are a few more

safety regs, procedures and common sense rules we all now have to deal with...

- Pushing a lawnmower in the fresh air used to be a wonderful thing. Now, with the evolution of mechanized landscape machinery comes a long list of safety equipment that must be used when operating it. This runs the gamut from dust masks and goggles to protect your lungs and your eyes, to earplugs to protect your hearing.
- Jeans and tennis shoes then...full uniform with steel-toed shoes and color contrasting safety vests now. Uniforms are almost universally required now when working at commercial sites. This includes names on shirts and picture ID cards.
- A raft of regs regarding the use, storage and transporting of chemicals, including extensive training and certification have arrived in full force.

- Regular "tailgate" safety meetings and training, and continuing safety education are here to stay.
- The evolution of safety on public property when doing commercial maintenance has become more sophisticated, such as learning to deal with recycled water vs. potable water.
- Regular cleaning and maintenance of equipment and vehicles not only reflects professionalism, but results in safer workdays.

A Few Words About Lifting

There was a time when asking for help when lifting a heavy load simply was not macho. Now, lifting a canvas with debris has become a two-person job. Our company also provides trash cans with wheels to make that job even easier. And, the increasingly universal use of waist and back braces is encouraged, not laughed at.

Barbara's Words of Wisdom

Designing and showing a genuine interest in providing a safe work environment starts with the owners and managers. You have to set the tone and do as you say, treating your employees with respect. If you teach them early, causing safety to be on their minds always, it becomes second nature to them...giving them pride in contributing to the safe work environment we all deserve.

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.

 **LANDSCAPE CONTRACTORS
INSURANCE SERVICES, INC.**

1835 N. Fine Ave., Fresno, CA 93727
(559) 650-3555 ph / (559) 650-3558 fx
Website: www.lcisinc.com