

Grower 101:

Keeping Your Employees SAFE

Greenhouse Safety Program Checklist

- Communicate safety on a daily basis.
- Let employees, customers, suppliers and any other visitors know that safety is a priority in your greenhouse.
- Make safety part of your supervisors' job descriptions. Require them to lead brief, weekly safety sessions and strictly enforce safety violations.
 - Require workers to report any hazards or potential hazards. Give them the authority to make corrections.
- Provide the necessary resources, such as time, for a proactive safety program.
- Require employees to promptly report all work-related injuries, illnesses and accidents — even minor ones. Keep a written record of all incidents and review them monthly looking for trends.
- Promptly investigate all injuries, illnesses and accidents. Include suggestion in your investigation to prevent recurrence.
 - Recognize employees who work safely. Consider implementing a safety incentive program.
 - Ensure all safety program elements are presented in a language and manner your workers understand.
 - Document attendance at safety meetings and training sessions in writing.

A proactive safety program can reduce injury-related costs and, more importantly, the risk of serious harm to your employees.

By Barbara Mulhern

Picture yourself in this situation: You are busy managing the greenhouse when an employee suddenly notifies you that a co-worker has been injured. You drop what you are doing and discover the injured employee has his finger caught in a pot-filling machine. Before you know it, you are down an employee and facing a costly workers' compensation claim. Additionally, you have an Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) inspector knocking at your door. To make matters worse, the injured employee is Hispanic, and one of the OSHA investigators finds out you haven't adequately trained your Spanish-speaking workers in a language and manner they understand.

Proactive Implementation

Sound like a nightmare? It very well could be, which is why it is critically important to develop and implement a proactive, written safety program.

While a good safety program may not prevent every injury, it can greatly reduce the risk of serious injuries or deaths and increase your chances for a more profitable year.

You may be wondering how greenhouse safety is tied to profitability, since a safety program will involve some costs. Here is one good example: The cost of a single, serious employee injury goes well beyond the injured worker's medical costs. Other costs, in addition to a potential workers' compensation claim or OSHA penalties, include:

- Downtime and reduced productivity while the injured employee is off work.
- Costs associated with recruiting, hiring and training a replacement worker.
- Time spent on insurance-related paperwork; communicating with the insurer; and interviews with insurers, OSHA investigators or even the injured worker's lawyer.
- Potential legal fees (particularly if you need to defend yourself against an OSHA claim or a private lawsuit).



Safety should be a paramount concern at your greenhouse; communicate safety on a daily basis to all of your employees.

management



Trip-and-fall hazards, such as hoses lying across the greenhouse floor, and improperly bending, stooping or lifting are two safety hazards to be aware of.

• Potentially losing good employees, especially if this is not the first incident to occur and other workers decide that your greenhouse is not a safe place to work.

Assessing The Risks

An excellent first step in setting up a safety program is walking through your property and writing down all of the potential hazards you see. It is also a good idea to invite your insurer/workers' compensation carrier to accompany you. Ask this person if he or she has a "safety audit" checklist you could use or modify to meet your specific needs.

What are you looking for during this walk-through? Here are a few common hazards:

- Pot-filling machines and other equipment where workers' fingers or other body parts could get caught.

- Conveyor belts and forklifts.
- Exposed wiring, overloaded circuits and other electrical hazards.

- Wet, slippery floors that could result in falls.

- Trip-and-fall hazards such as hoses lying across the greenhouse floor.

- Improperly stored chemicals or employees not wearing the appropriate personal protective equipment when working with chemicals.

- Bending, stooping, improper lifting, overreaching and employees rapidly moving their hands in the same position for hours at a time, which can result in ergonomic injuries.

- Fire hazards (this is an especially critical issue if your greenhouse is made of polyethylene film or other materials that can emit noxious fumes).

Once you have identified all of the potential hazards, be sure to rank them: Major hazards that are immediately life threatening should be dealt with first. Then take steps to either eliminate hazards (when practical) or reduce the risk of becoming injured or ill due to that hazard (when not practical).

Some sample questions to ask yourself are:

- Do you train workers to regularly inspect, sweep and mop greenhouse floors and walkways to avoid slips and falls?

- Have you done training on working safely around hazardous equipment such as conveyor belts?

- If your employees are making repairs from the top of your greenhouse roof, have you provided the fall-protection equipment that OSHA requires?

Keep OSHA In Mind

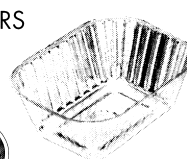
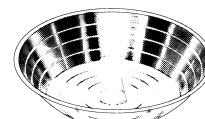
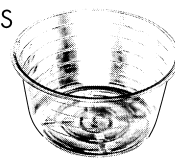
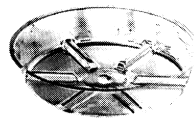
A recent check of OSHA inspections throughout the past few years in the federal agency's "Ornamental and Nursery Products" category (OSHA Standard Industrial Classification 0181) found these and many other examples:

One company initially faced more than \$15,000 in proposed penalties for violations of OSHA's Occupational Noise Standard, forklift training requirements, requirements when using hand and

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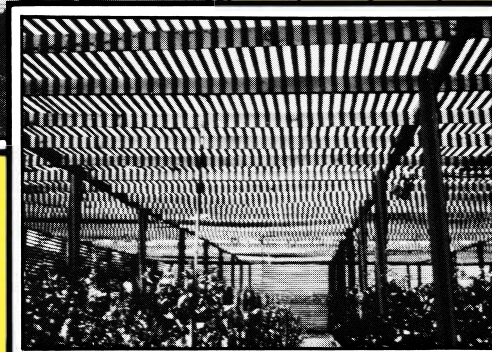
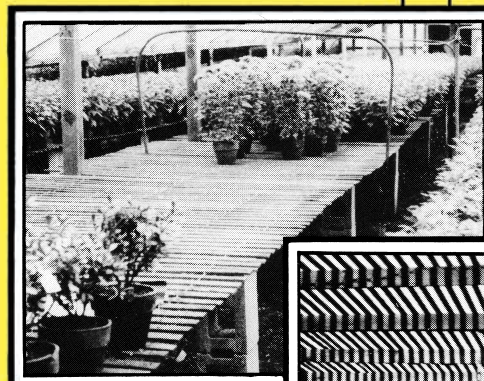
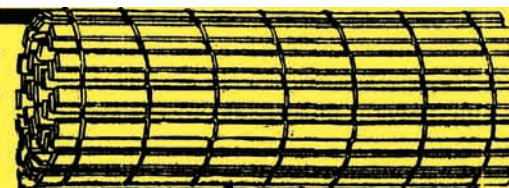
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portable power tools, and rules regulating the guarding of floor and wall openings and holes. This company was also cited for violating OSHA's "general duty clause," which requires employers to furnish places of employment free from recognized hazards that are

causing or could cause death or serious physical harm to employees.

Another company initially faced \$3,500 in proposed penalties for violations of OSHA's standards regulating personal protective equipment, respiratory protection, sanitation and electrical wiring.

Two other companies, which faced penalties totaling \$4,950 and \$3,000, respectively, were cited for violating OSHA's Hazard Communication Standard (the regulation requires you to keep a current inventory of all hazardous chemicals and up-to-date material safety data

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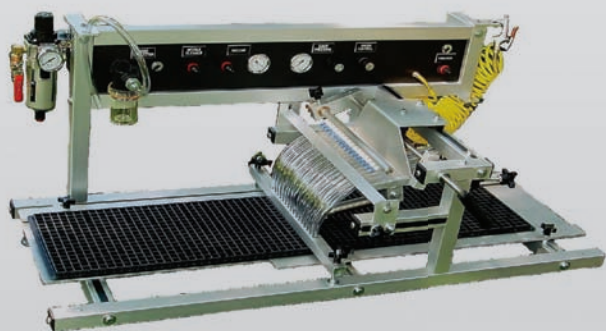
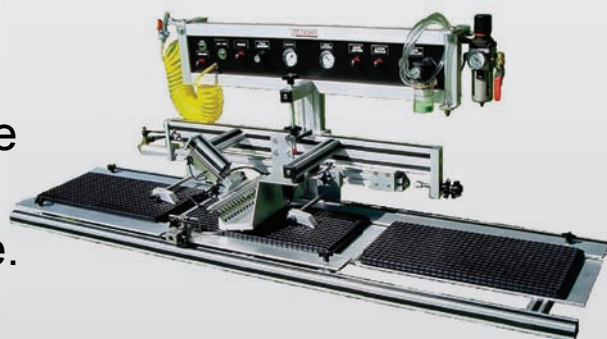
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sheets (MSDSs) as well as train your employees in potential chemical hazards) and one of OSHA's agricultural standards that requires the guarding of farm field equipment.

Setting Up Your Program

The following are some suggestions on how to set up an effective safety program.

Work with management.

Ensure that top management is committed to safety. Without that commitment, your safety program is not likely to succeed.

Put it in writing. Develop a short, written "safety policy" that is translated into a language or languages your employees understand. Make sure it includes a statement about the importance of safety to top management and a statement that says all employees are expected to participate in your safety program.

Develop safety rules. Put these rules in writing and ensure they are reviewed with all employees.

Create a training schedule.

Safety training sessions do not need to be long. In fact, many greenhouse growers have found that brief "tailgate" safety training sessions are more effective than long safety meetings. A tailgate session is an oral session on one specific topic that takes place in a location where workers are comfortable (such as in an employee break room or even in the greenhouse if it is quiet there at the time). Tailgate training typically takes just 5-15 minutes.

Provide safety signage and equipment. If you have Spanish-speaking workers, make sure your



Make sure your employees are equipped with the proper protective equipment for their jobs.

Greenhouse Safety Dos And Don'ts

DO:

- Inspect your greenhouse for hazards at the start of each day. Keep an eye out for new hazards at all times.
- Provide signage warning workers of potential hazards (such as conveyor belts, chemical application, etc.).
- Set a good example. Wear safety glasses, gloves and other personal protective equipment and model safe behaviors.

DON'T:

- Ignore safety violations. Disciplining an employee for a safety violation is preferable to having a serious injury.
- Think your safety program will be successful without top management commitment. An effective safety program requires commitment from everyone.
- Use ignorance as an excuse. Become familiar with OSHA regulations and other safety-related requirements.

"warning" or "danger" signs are in English and Spanish. Also, make a commitment to invest in high-quality personal protective equipment that will last.

By asking yourself the right questions and looking for potential problems, you can create a good

safety program at your greenhouse, help keep your employees free from harm and reduce injury-related costs for your business. **GPN**

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