

GROUNDS FOR A SAFE SCHOOL:

A Health and Safety Tip Sheet for School Groundskeepers



As school groundskeepers, you work hard to keep grassy areas and play structures neat and safe for students. When you take care of your own health and safety at work, you avoid disruptions in your life and on school grounds, and can continue providing this important service to students.

A little planning will go a long way toward making your work environment safer. These three steps will help you get started:

1. Identify job hazards
2. Work towards solutions
3. Follow up and share your successes

Step 1. Identify job hazards

The chart on the following pages lists many of the common hazards that affect groundskeepers. Use this chart to identify the hazards relevant to your work. Talk to your co-workers to find out if they have similar concerns. Report any hazards to your supervisor.

Step 2. Work towards solutions

The chart also offers tips for reducing hazards. Develop a plan to implement the changes that are needed. Some suggestions:

- Assess what changes you can make on your own, and what you need your employer or supervisor to do.
- When possible, work together with your school's site safety coordinator, union, and co-workers.
- Share your ideas with your supervisor.
- Workplace hazards can be reduced or eliminated by: (1) removing the hazard (preferable); (2) instituting policies and procedures that reduce the hazard; and/or (3) using personal protective equipment.
- Find out if there are laws that support the change you need.

* Did you know?

- School employees as a whole have a higher rate of work-related injuries and illnesses than do other California workers.
- The most common cause of death for grounds maintenance workers in 2006 was using or operating tools or machinery.
- Common injuries to school groundskeepers include sprains, strains and tears, bruises, abrasions, and pain in the back, shoulders, wrists, and hands.

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Common Job Hazards and Safety Tips for School Groundskeepers

Power Tools and Equipment

Employees who use power tools may be exposed to falling or sharp objects, or to harmful dusts or fumes. Broken equipment poses hazards such as moving parts, hot surfaces, and electrical shock. Here are some tips to prevent injuries from power tools:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check all equipment for loose, broken, or damaged parts before use. Immediately report any damaged equipment, such as frayed wires. • Follow the manufacturers' instructions for proper maintenance and repair, and replace any equipment that is not safe. • Inspect the work area for hazards. Remove sticks, bottles, hidden wires, posts, and other debris. • Never operate gasoline- or diesel-powered equipment indoors; this prevents deadly levels of carbon monoxide from building up. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep lawnmower blades sharp. • Use tools with padded handles to minimize vibration. • Ask your supervisor for high-top boots with steel-reinforced toes to protect against falling or abrasive objects. • Ask your supervisor for appropriate personal protective equipment such as goggles, gloves, respirators, and hearing protection. • Be sure emergency phone numbers are clearly posted and that a first aid kit is available and fully stocked. |
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Ergonomic Hazards

Groundskeepers can suffer from chronic lower back pain, muscle strains, ligament and tendon injuries, spinal disc degeneration, shoulder injuries, and tennis elbow from repeated motions and heavy lifting.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow guidelines for proper lifting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Keep the load close to your body; - Squat and lift with your legs; - Keep your back straight; and - Do not twist. • Use a dolly, cart, or hydraulic lift to move heavy objects such as bags of fertilizer or soil. Get help if the load is too heavy to lift. Do not rely on back belts. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Store the heaviest items on shelves at waist height. • Stand and do gentle stretches when possible. • Obtain the SASH ergonomics fact sheet for additional practical tips. |
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Chemicals

Groundskeepers routinely use pesticides, fungicides, herbicides, insecticides, rodenticides, sanitizers, and other hazardous chemicals as part of their job.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find out what types of chemicals are present in your work area. • Ask your supervisor to provide less toxic chemicals when possible. • Ask your supervisor for chemicals training, including how to use gloves, respirators or other protective gear, as indicated by the SDS. Be familiar with the emergency plan in case of a chemical accident. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure all chemicals you use are labeled and that you have a Safety Data Sheet (SDS)* for each product. If you put chemicals into a different container, label the new container. • Bring clean clothes and shoes to change into at the end of the work shift so you do not bring any chemicals home. Wash your work clothes separately from other clothes.
<p>*What is an SDS? An SDS is a Safety Data Sheet prepared by the manufacturer of a chemical or product. It provides detailed information about a chemical, such as how to protect yourself (including the use of gloves, respirators, or other protective gear), how to store the chemical, and what to do in an emergency. Your supervisor must provide the SDS on request.</p>	

Slip and Fall Hazards

Slippery or uneven walking surfaces are the most common causes of slips and falls in schools.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the cause of the slippery floor and address the problem to eliminate the hazard. • Always use a ladder or footstool to reach for objects. Never use a box or cart. Ask for help if needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When using a ladder, put the ladder on a stable, dry surface. Make sure it is fully open and locked. Do not stand on the top two rungs of the ladder. Ask for ladder safety training. You may also need training in fall protection. • Wear shoes with non-skid soles.
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Noise

Some power tools (such as leaf blowers) can be loud enough to damage your hearing permanently.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask your supervisor to provide ear muffs or ear plugs as needed to protect your hearing when using power equipment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask your supervisor to post a copy of the OSHA noise standard in the workroom. • Make sure powered equipment is in good condition; this will help reduce noise.
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Heat/Sun

School groundskeepers spend a lot of time outdoors and in the sun. Workers who spend many hours outdoors under the sun are at risk of heat illness, which can lead to death. Exposure to the sun can also cause problems such as cataracts and skin cancer. Cal/OSHA's Heat Illness standard requires that workers be provided water, shade for rest breaks, and training.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use wrap-around sunglasses with UVA/UVB protection to reduce your risk of cataracts. • Wear thin, light-colored long pants, long-sleeve shirt, and a hat. • Use sun screen even on body parts covered from the sun. • Take rest breaks in the shade. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drink plenty of cool, potable water throughout the day. • Watch for symptoms of heat illness. • Check your body every month for any spots on the skin that have changed in size, shape, or color. See a doctor right away if you find any abnormalities. • Ask your supervisor for training on preventing heat illness. |
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Electrical Hazards

Working with electrical equipment (such as mowers) can expose you to electrical current, which can cause shock, injury, and sometimes death. Landscape service workers are more likely to die by electrocution than the average U.S. worker.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediately turn off the power if you smell burning plastic or smoke, see sparks, or feel tingling or a shock. Do not use the equipment. Report the problem immediately • Ask for training on electrical hazards. • Follow steps for proper lock out/tag out when servicing equipment. Turn off and disconnect the equipment. Make sure the source of power has a lock or a tag. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask your supervisor to make sure that ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) of the breaker or receptacle type are being used. • Make sure electrical connections are suitable for the type of tool being used and the working conditions (wet, dusty, flammable vapors). • Advocate for CPR training. |
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Step 3. Follow up and share your successes

Once you've identified the hazards and solutions, follow up to make sure the changes are implemented. Contact your district's or school's safety coordinator for help or suggestions. Share your successes with your co-workers and your supervisor.

School Site Safety Coordinator

The person in charge of health and safety at your school is:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

District Resource

The person in charge of health and safety at your district is:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Reporting Injuries and Illnesses

It is important to report work-related injuries and illnesses. You cannot be discriminated against or punished for doing so. If you have a work-related injury or illness, contact:

Name: _____

Phone: _____

To learn more....

Go to the SASH website at www.dir.ca.gov/CHSWC/SASH and click on Hazards by Occupation. Or call 510-642-5507.

* Safety Pays

Although resources are limited in school districts, some solutions do not require extra money.

Preventing injuries can actually SAVE lives and SAVE money by:

- reducing workers' compensation claims;
- avoiding loss in productivity when injuries occur; and
- improving employee morale!