

Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant

SUCCESS STORY 2018

Partnering to Reduce Preventable Non-fatal Work-related Injuries

Chopping Down the Language Barriers of Workplace Safety

Public Health Issue: Landscaping and tree trimming workers are at high risk of injury from many serious hazards including falls, machinery-related incidents, electrocutions, falling tree limbs, and motor vehicle crashes. Many of these hazards can be reduced or eliminated by applying known safety and health “best practices” and solutions. In 2016, the national fatality rate (1) for grounds maintenance workers, which includes the occupations of landscaping and tree trimming, was more than four times higher than that of the average fatality rate for all occupations. In California, the 2017 non-fatal injury and illness incidence rate (1) for the landscaping industry was almost twice the average rate for all industries. The rapidly growing California population, improving economic conditions, and increased consumer spending are all driving up the demand for landscaping and tree trimming services. The heavy growth in residential remodeling and construction is also increasing the need for hardscaping work such as erecting fences and paving paths in patios and yards. It is estimated that there are over 10,000 landscaping companies in California (2). Approximately seventy percent of these companies employ two or fewer workers, have language barriers to safety training, lack safety knowledge and resources, and do not have fixed office locations. While landscaping and tree trimming have previously been recognized as high-risk (3), there have not been many interventions (3) in this industry targeting small employers with a predominantly non-English speaking workforce.

Intervention: The California Department of Public Health Occupational Health Branch (OHB) has formed multi-disciplinary partnerships with organizations that have the depth of knowledge, expertise, and skills to conduct community-based outreach, provide interactive bilingual safety trainings, and have long-term trusted relationships with employers and hard-to-reach worker groups such as the National Day Laborers Organizing Network. Our partners include the Hispanic Arborist Association, Tree Care Industry Association, Safety Center, UCLA Labor Occupational Safety and Health Program, State Compensation Insurance Fund, and others. OHB and its partners have assembled existing bilingual safety and health training materials and are developing additional worker-friendly resources to be used during employer and worker training that will be conducted in the spring of 2019. Training topics include methods of hazard identification, workers’ safety rights, the proper use of safety equipment, and other safe work practices. The trainings will also present case studies that employers can use as teaching tools at onsite safety talks such as during tailgate meetings. In addition, OHB and its partners will assist employers on putting together safety programs that address the companies’ specific hazards and safety needs.

Impact: The demand for landscaping and tree trimming services will continue to increase alongside California’s economic growth. The large population of landscaping and tree trimming workers at risk in

California and their frequent exposures to numerous safety hazards make safety training a vital part of OHB's effort to decrease work-related injuries, illnesses, and fatalities, and to promote a safety culture in this industry. In addition, OHB anticipates that the fires in California will increase employment for landscaping and tree trimming workers during the post-fire rebuild phase. It is critical that employers and workers performing post-fire rebuild work know how to identify unsafe conditions and when to use safety measures. Information gained from this project will also be useful to landscaping and tree trimming industry employers and workers nationwide.

Footnotes:

1. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Summary of Occupational Illnesses, Injuries, and Fatalities, 2016-7 (<https://www.bls.gov/iif/>)
2. InfoUSA, 2018 (https://lp.infousa.com/msn_infousa/brand/landing-157475-10183B4.html?)
3. United States Department of Labor, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Landscape and Horticultural Services (<https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/landscaping/index.html>)