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Landscape Industry Guidance for Business Operations During COVID-19

The landscape industry, including lawn care, landscape maintenance, design/build, tree care, and irrigation and water management, takes employee and client safety and health very seriously, employing regular safety training and enforcing strong safety standards on the job, following Federal guidelines. Landscape Industry firms use regularly scheduled employee training and adherence to Federal, state, and local safety and health standards to mitigate hazardous exposures at landscape work sites.

Landscape professionals maintain and protect the living environments around hospitals, government facilities, housing areas, parks, schools, and more, protecting public safety by:

- performing regular maintenance to mow, prune, control weeds, and inspect for safety and security issues;
- performing essential treatments to reduce the spread of dangerous and deadly diseases transmitted by pests like mosquitoes, ticks, and fleas;
- removing fallen trees and mitigating overhead hazards from wind effects;
- providing maintenance and plant removal to assist in fire abatement;
- managing invasive species; and
- keeping public and private pathways free from obstruction and potential risk.

The nature of landscape work, which is performed outdoors, individually, or in small teams with little public contact poses a lower risk of spreading COVID-19. According to OSHA classifications, the landscape industry falls in the “lower risk” category of exposure (the lowest level on their occupational classification of risk for COVID-19).

Landscape Industry companies are instructed to follow all Federal, State, and Local public health and safety directives. The following guidance for the Landscape Industry During COVID-19 have been developed according to OSHA and CDC guidelines and should be observed during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Sanitation and Safety

COVID-19 is spread from person-to-person, through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The virus is also believed to spread by people touching a contaminated surface or object and then touching one's mouth, nose, or possibly the eyes. Employers and workers should follow these general practices recommended by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) to help prevent exposure to coronavirus:

- Require employees to wash hands with soap and water frequently for at least 20 seconds. If soap and running water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- Implement social distancing (staying at least 6' feet apart).
- Encourage workers to stay home if they are sick and avoid close contact with people who are sick. Consider conducting a mandatory temperature check prior to beginning work in the morning; any employee with a temperature over 100.4 F is required to return home.
- Encourage employees to self-monitor for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 if they suspect possible exposure.
- Identify and isolate potentially infectious individuals is a critical step in protecting workers, customers, and others at a worksite.
- Encourage respiratory etiquette, including covering coughs and sneezes, and avoid touching your eyes, nose, or mouth with unwashed hands.

Institute and enforce strict sanitation standards. Clean and disinfect all work environments and personal protective equipment daily, including machine handles, tools, safety glasses, safety vests, gloves, and soles of boots.

When choosing cleaning chemicals, employers should consult information on Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-approved disinfectants with claims against emerging viral pathogens. Products with EPA-approved emerging viral pathogens claims are expected to be effective against SARS-CoV-2 based on data for harder to kill viruses. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for use of all cleaning and disinfection products (e.g., concentration, application method and contact time, PPE).

Where possible, initiate engineering controls to isolate employees from work-related hazards. In workplaces where they are appropriate, these types of controls reduce exposure to hazards without relying on worker behavior and can be the most cost-effective solution to implement.

Engineering controls for SARS-CoV-2 include: installing high-efficiency air filters and increasing ventilation rates in the work environment. install physical barriers, such as clear plastic and sneeze guards where appropriate.

Employee Protocols

Support Staff and Office Personnel_Companies should establish internal policies and practices, including teleworking or flexible work hours (staggered shifts), that reduce the number of employees at a facility at one time. Discourage workers from using other workers' phones, desks, offices, or other work tools and equipment, when possible.

All employees who are not required to be on customer sites performing landscape or those employees assigned to the critical and continued operation of the business entity should be considered for working remotely.”

Ensure that sick leave policies are flexible and consistent with public health guidance and that employees are aware of these policies. Maintain flexible policies that permit employees to stay home to care for a sick family member. Relax policies that require notes from physicians.

Ensure that the company has the information technology and infrastructure needed to support multiple employees who may be able to work from home, and cross-train employees to perform other tasks to prepare for increased sick leave.

There should not be more than 10 employees on-site, and when employees are on site 6' social distancing should be strictly enforced. The offices should remain closed to the general public while this policy is in effect. Consider increasing janitorial services to assist in continuously disinfecting practices.

Ensure that any training sessions and safety briefings are in a language that crew members can understand.

Crew and Field Staff

Conduct safety training and staff meetings via video teleconferencing and discontinue group meetings and in-person trainings.

Field crews must understand and be sensitive to the public's concern about COVID-19 transmission. Provide field staff with talking points to share with the public about their safety protocols and the essential nature of their work.

Field teams should include the least number of employees that can safely carry out work at a site, and crew members should drive separately to the site whenever possible. Only the driver should be allowed to touch the controls anywhere in the vehicle. Gloves should be worn by employees when pumping gas.

Client Protocols

Contact with clients should be executed via email, phone calls, video teleconference, when possible, and if personal contact is required, then maintain social distancing of 6' when on the property with the client or their customers or the general public. If in-person contact is required, then maintain social distancing of 6 feet at the client's or customer's property, or when communicating with the general public." Do not leave behind door hangers or other receipts.

Communicate with clients about the current status of allowable work in your state or locality Explain the essential nature of landscape services and detail any operational changes due to COVID-19.

Provide clients 24-hour notification via phone or email that you will be servicing their property.