



Springing into Warmer Weather

Depending on where you live, the affects of spring are setting in. The days are longer, the temperature is rising, and spending time outside is becoming a treat vs. a chore. As much as I enjoy the change from winter to spring, I know unique safety challenges come with it. This month, I'd like to discuss a few topics that will help us prepare with a focus on prevention.

Saturated Soil

We enjoy the rock solid, frozen ground during the winter. It helps us gain access to areas we would be unable to access otherwise, even with special equipment. However, as the temperature rises, what was once solid and stable is now, soft and unstable. This hazard is routine, it happens every spring. Unfortunately, every spring we experience events related to unstable soil. Front line leaders and safety professionals should recognize and raise awareness around this often underestimated hazard. Safety talk examples include: outrigger placement and stabilization, off road operation of vehicles and equipment, and slip, trip, & fall prevention. Unstable soil is a major contributor in rollover incidents. A tire dropping off the shoulder when the soil is stable is bad enough, a tire dropping off the shoulder when the ground is soft is disastrous. There have been instances of stationary trucks tipping over when parked on steeper grades. The soil being unstable, gives way to the weight of the truck and tires or outriggers slowly sink in as it topples over.

Insects and Poisonous Plants

The warmer weather triggers an onslaught of pests that range from annoying to dangerous. Preventing tick borne illnesses is a big challenge. Especially for crews who work in remote grassy and wooded areas. Contractors should make sure that employees have access to insect repellent, careful to apply only permethrin based repellents to arc rated clothing. Poisonous plants are blooming and sending out new shoots as well. These new shoots are vibrant and full of the oils that cause serious skin irritations. Again, contractors must make sure that employees have access to products that can quickly remove these oils or protection. Secured pant legs, long sleeve shirts, and gloves go along way in the prevention of both hazards.

Heat Illness

Workers exposed to elevated heat for the first time or for the first heat wave of the season are at higher risk of heat related illness if not managed properly. The body's natural ability to regulate heat, the affects of layered PPE, or simply the nature of the work environment presents safety challenges during high heat periods. Contractors should recognize the first hot days of the season as elevated risk and develop action plans to acclimatize workers and provide relief from the heat. Relief in the form of shady rest areas, cool water, and access to an air-conditioned truck cab can go along way in



preventing heat related illness. Front line leaders should provide rest breaks at a frequency and a duration that achieves the desired result, a cooled down worker. With workers moving from one region of the country to the next, understanding the need for acclimatization is even more important since the northern lineman could easily find themselves in the balmy south in the blink of an eye. Contractors should take time to discuss heat illness prevention with new employees and ensure they are aware of personal risk factors that contribute to heat illness. Things like pre-existing medical conditions, drug and alcohol use, sleep deprivation, and body weight all contribute to one's heat tolerance. Federal OSHA is currently working on a Heat Injury and Illness Prevention Standard and some states already have them. With that in mind, if you don't currently have a Heat Illness Prevention Plan, now is the time to start working on it.

I'm looking forward to the longer, more productive days of Spring and with a little planning and prevention, safer days.

Thank you,
Mike Starner

