

## Teenage Workers

### Key Points

- When they analyze reports, many landscape contractors find the summer months are when their workers have the most safety incidents. This is because June, July and August make up the busiest season for most landscape companies, and it's also when new employees are coming on board. This creates something of a "perfect storm" since, under any circumstances, employees with less than three months' experience are more than twice as likely to be injured as employees with three to six months of experience, according to insurance-claim data.
- Teenagers are often among landscape companies' summer hires. Teens are a good fit for seasonal work because their availability lines up with the industry's peak season. On the other hand, teen workers are injured at higher rates than adult workers despite the fact they typically work fewer hours than adults (National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health).
- For reasons related to brain development, teens are less likely than adults to take safety seriously and more likely to take risks. This is particularly worrisome in an industry that involves a relatively high number of hazards. On the bright side, teens can work safely as part of a landscape crew when they and their employers understand the safety challenges they face and take appropriate precautions.

### Employers' and Supervisors' Checklist:

- ✓ Conduct a comprehensive [safety orientation](#) with all new employees, including teens, and have crew leaders conduct tailgate training as needed when new employees are part of their crew.
- ✓ Emphasize the importance of personal protective equipment (PPE) and provide a hands-on demonstration of all PPE to be assigned to employees.
- ✓ Be aware young workers often avoid asking questions because they're afraid of sounding "stupid." Make sure trainers, crew leaders and fellow crew members encourage all new employees to ask questions.
- ✓ Remember child labor laws prohibit 16-year-olds from operating a motor vehicle at work for and allow it only under limited circumstances for 17-year-olds.
- ✓ Understand your insurance policy as well. Minimum driving age varies among companies. Many strongly advise that drivers be at least 21. Accident and insurance claim statistics show young drivers are the most at risk of being involved in an accident.
- ✓ Be aware child labor laws also ban those under age 18 from operating many types of mobile machinery.

- ✓ Know the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) of 1938. This is the primary federal law regarding employment of workers under 18. The FLSA applies to your entire business if you have annual gross revenues of \$500,000 or more, and some states extend the law to all businesses. Even if your business isn't covered, the FLSA applies to individuals engaged in producing, transporting, loading, or receiving goods for interstate commerce. This includes workers who handle documents related to interstate commerce, including credit card transactions. Learn more at <http://www.dol.gov/whd/childlabor.htm>. Two other groups outline work prohibited for young workers because the U.S. secretary of labor has declared the tasks too hazardous for minors. One defines agricultural work those under 16 cannot perform, and the other identifies nonagricultural jobs prohibited for workers under 18. Be aware your state's child-labor laws might be more stringent than federal laws. See these sites for further guidance: <https://www.dol.gov/general/topic/youthlabor/agerequirements>, [https://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/childlabor101\\_text.htm](https://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/childlabor101_text.htm), <https://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/childlabor102.pdf>, <https://www.youthrules.gov/index.htm>, and <https://www.dol.gov/whd/state/agriemp2.htm>.
- ✓ Keep in mind how dangerous any powered equipment can be, and carefully choose which machines you allow teen workers to operate. Amputations and fatal accidents can happen in an instant. Be particularly wary of lawn mowers. Many people fail to appreciate the hazards associated with them because they are such familiar pieces of equipment. See [last month's Safety Article](#) for more about common mower-related mistakes and ways to avoid them.
- ✓ Know federal OSHA requires you to provide – and ensure employees understand – training specific to each machine you require them to operate.
- ✓ Make sure teens and all workers know they should never take shortcuts, such as removing or bypassing a safety device or failing to use proper PPE, because it could cost them their lives.
- ✓ Be sure your company has a written cell-phone policy, and be know you'll have to be vigilant to enforce it with teen workers. Your policy should restrict personal cell phone use to before work, after work, or during scheduled breaks, except in the case of an emergency. Those who carry company cell phones should not handle them when driving, operating equipment, or using or carrying tools.
- ✓ Consider assigning each new employee – and especially teenagers – to work alongside an experienced crew member for a certain period of time to reinforce safety training.
- ✓ Carefully supervise teens, making sure they use safe work practices and can identify hazards.
- ✓ Create a system for ensuring crew leaders, supervisors, and adult co-workers know what tasks young workers can't undertake. You might label equipment minors cannot use and/or have teens wear shirts of a certain color denoting they shouldn't perform particular jobs.
- ✓ Understand that even if they've been properly trained, young workers might lack the

experience and maturity to recognize and handle hazardous situations or emergencies. Avoid giving them too much responsibility by always pairing them with at least one older worker on jobsites.

## **Dos and Don'ts for Teen Workers**

### **Do:**

- Know that working in the landscape industry involves many hazards and you must take safety seriously to avoid losing fingers, toes, limbs, and even your life.
- Understand and follow federal and state child-labor laws and use safe work practices. You can request this information from school counselors and you can find it yourself on the Internet. Four good sites to visit are <http://www.youthrules.dol.gov>, <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/teenworkers/index.html>, <http://www.osha.gov/SLTC/teenworkers/landscaping/index.html> (covers hazards associated with heat, ultraviolet radiation, pesticides, electricity, noise, and eye injuries) and <http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/health/can-u-digit.pdf> (discusses heat stress, pesticides, lifting, and use of motor vehicles, trimmers, and mowers).
- Be aware child labor laws prohibit 16-year-olds from operating a motor vehicle at work for and allow it only under limited circumstances for 17-year-olds. Know these laws also ban those under age 18 from operating many types of machinery.
- Pay close attention to and follow all safety training provided by your employer. Ask questions and request additional training if you are unsure of anything.
- Know you have the right to refuse unsafe work conditions and tasks.
- Wear appropriate personal protective equipment for every job you perform.
- Protect yourself from the harmful effects of the sun and heat. Wear a hat, use sunscreen, drink plenty of water, and take breaks as needed.
- Pick up stones, bottles, pinecones, sticks, and other objects that could be thrown by leaf blowers, lawn mowers, or line trimmers.
- When working near roadways, wear a fluorescent safety vest and always face oncoming traffic.
- Read chemical labels and follow all label instructions.

### **Don't**

- Violate your company's cell phone policy or use a cell phone or any electronic device while working, except in emergencies.
- Be afraid to ask questions if you are unsure how to perform a task safely and correctly. Crew members should ask questions during and after training. Crew leaders and supervisors are happy to answer your questions and provide additional training.
- Perform tasks or operate equipment prohibited for someone your age.
- Operate any piece of equipment before you've been trained to use that particular machine.
- Take on any task without first considering the potential danger involved.
- Smoke on the job or work under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Lift objects weighing more than 50 pounds by yourself.

- Operate equipment such as lawn mowers, leaf blowers, or line trimmers within 45 feet of people or pets.
- Fuel equipment before it cools down or overfill a fuel tank.
- Place hands or feet near motorized blades or strings.
- Store chemicals in unlabeled or improperly labeled containers or use chemicals from such containers.

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