

15 - 20 minute speech
February 3, 2005

Speech to Convention of Golf Course Superintendents Association of America, Orlando, FL Feb 2005 by _____, Regional Safety Manager.

Speech Draft:

Good evening. There are moments in life when reflection is in order. I reflect most graciously for the opportunity to be with you tonight. Being one who has taken risks all my life, from Special Forces in Vietnam to the harsh conditions of the North Pole, to the hazardous duty of being on the road 90% of the year, I have developed an appreciation of the importance of safety, and I want to share my thoughts on that with you tonight.

We all made it here to Orlando, and I hope you make it back safely. But as we wish each other safe trips and hear from our spouses, "Have a Safe Trip", there is only so much we can do to be safe when traveling. Some things are just out of our control. We're not going to drive the train, plane or cab. But we may drive a few golf carts when we return, and then safety reenters our consciousness.

So let me start by asking you, how many of you are employing a lockout/tag out technique? For those who don't it is the practice of de-energizing your power equipment while being maintained. There are really more steps involved than what may be apparent at first. For instance, did your technician not only shut off the power source, but secure the source from outside intervention and accidental reactivation? That is just one of many aspects of a comprehensive safety program that we employ; and I'll be happy to discuss more details on that later.

While we may not be in charge of a massive production like monitoring gas flow at an oil refinery, where human errors and shortcuts can be catastrophic, we do have power carts that can flip us, mowers that can chew us up, and chemicals that can send us to the hospital. So it is important that we keep safety issues on our minds. Not just to protect our jobs, but the people we work with and the consumers we serve.

I'm going to share with you a five-step safety program that we implement company wide. I'll try to focus mainly on the golf maintenance side of our business. Currently we own 16 courses and manage 26 others. It is a private company that works hard to maintain the trust and compassion for its employees. Even with committed owners, it takes time to implement a complete safety program, but the rewards can be substantial as we found out in our third year of the program.

I have outlined the five steps on the handout, so hopefully you won't need notes, and I'll be happy to answer questions afterward.

* I mentioned committed owners because that is where it has to be decided that expenditures of time and money are worthwhile for long-term gain. All owners are leery of spending money, and they usually expect immediate results. When I pitched the program, I flatly stated that I expected it was going to take three to five years for the investment to be considered a success. However,

as a result of bringing a new awareness to the safety issue, we achieved an instant drop in accident and injury claims.

* Now once we discover that owners are committed we have to get through the upper management that the inconvenience of implementing safety procedures is worth every hour or four that slows down the job. So it is essential that upper management do not succeed in watering down or using politics to scuttle a safety-related modification on the job. We have all see it happen before. People naturally resist change. We get comfortable with a certain way of doing things. And none of us likes to be criticized or be subject to evaluations that suggest making changes.

But on the flip side, there are always alternative ways to accomplish tasks. Efficiencies are generally achieved when more eyes are on the subject. And it is usually the eyes of an outside observer that can spot things not so readily apparent. I like the example that someone showed me once. Without looking at your wristwatch, describe to yourself the face of it. What colors are in it? What type of numbers? How many numbers, all 12 or just four? Some things we see numerous times a day, we don't really see. So it is that a potentially dangerous safety issue, whether it is an overload on an electrical circuit, or a loose handrail over a bridge, could easily be overlooked time and time again. This is why we stress that upper management get involved. Because they have to be critiqued, then supervise the improvements to the rest of the crew. A vital element in improving safety.

* Once all parties are prepared to implement a program, then the safety managers must be appointed and trained. The program they are responsible for starts with pre-job qualifications, or a thorough evaluation of present conditions. Here we look at the current environment, gauge the knowledge of the safety officers, help them gain the resources needed to fill the gaps between what they know and what they need to know.

It can be a daunting challenge to keep up with regulatory compliance. After our walk-through of the entire golf course including maintenance facilities, we check for reference materials. For instance, how many of you can quickly locate your MSDS binder? MSDS stands for material safety data sheet. Each chemical being used is detailed for its hazards and warnings on combining with other compounds. Considering how many hazardous materials we use in our golf course maintenance businesses, this is a critical tool for the safety officer. No one is expected to memorize all this data, but having it at easy reach is critical to avoid mishaps - some of the most common being unsafe combinations and interactions among chemicals, or lack of proper ventilation in confined spaces.

* The fourth step of our safety program is an incentive program that rewards individuals who are achieving safety objectives. Our company has created a safety metric that records instances of at-fault accidents and OSHA record-able injuries. We then make each field employee with at least one-year of employment and a safety record falling within the metric to be eligible for an annual big-ticket prize drawing. Our company is big, therefore we can afford to award five F-150 pickups (one in each of five regions in the country). Your company can use other means, but it does keep all eyes on the prize by forcing a close scrutiny of safety procedures on a day-to-day basis.

I've seen some companies use lottery tickets, whatever works for you. Since we have five regions we hold company picnic to announce the winner as well as present other tokens of appreciation to those whom earned it. Announcing the success stories in front of the whole group is a tremendous motivator for others to "get in on that action". Everyone likes to be recognized for a job well done.

I won't attempt to explain the details of the metric itself, I can tell you that the combinations of factors are used to arrive at a figure that started at 25 in the first year, dropped to 12.5 the second and is now down to 10.5.

Now let me put that in terms, owners and managers understand. How many of you are familiar with EMR - Experience Modification Ratings conducted by your insurance companies? Great. As you know that is how your premiums are calculated. Since we implemented our safety program we have experienced double digit reductions in each of the last three years in the number of accidents and injuries. That has had a direct impact on the bottom line. For our company it translated to \$1.4 million worth of reduced insurance fees. These results far exceeded the anticipated return. In fact, in most cases implementing safety programs are generally viewed as a defense mechanism to get a grasp on rising insurance costs.

A stated objective could very well be simply stabilizing costs during a five-year period. Because I tell you it will not be an easy sell to convince owners that they "might" save money five years from now with a better safety program. There are investments to be made. It takes time to implement a comprehensive program, and as I mentioned earlier, it could slow down or delay profits. But keep in mind; we experienced an immediate drop in claims. And accidents and injuries of any kind can be more detrimental to keeping a job on a timeline or meeting a profit objective. So that is the picture you have to paint to get all parties engaged in the process. Which brings us to the final aspect - the training of field personnel.

* I am impressed that the GCSAA has adopted many of the safety standards that we pioneered in their re-certification program. Our company has devised a curriculum that trains personnel to achieve up to 4.2 credits of the 15 credit hours required. Earlier I mentioned MSDS sheet that covers hazard communications, which entails the Right to Know Law. Beyond that we train in confined space training and First Aid/CPR. We offer a ten-hour course in OSHA compliance and for our northern climates, training on snow and ice removal. Have you ever seen people from Texas try to operate a snowplow truck? It can be ugly.

The point is don't overlook the fundamentals of safety. Just as Tom Brady has mastered the fundamentals of his game to avoid interceptions, we need to ensure that shortcuts are not being taken. Mistakes in our league lead to injury or death. That's why educating field personnel on fire safety; blood born pathogens; personal protection equipment as fundamental as steel toe boots and safety equipment is critical.

You would be surprised to learn how many people work on golf courses without hardhats while the course is in play. Our company experiences 5 - 7 people a year getting hit with golf balls.

You probably already know how difficult it is to comply with environmental regulations. So part of the course will review wash-off and waste management techniques. But besides all this former classroom type formats, simple steps can be taken to encouragement safety improvements. We utilize a Near Miss booklet. It is in checkbook size, formatted to record unsafe conditions and recommend improvements.

In summary, the essential ingredient in a thorough and effective safety program is education. Make everyone is aware of your commitment to safety, and you will improve the quality of the job and the positive experience of your customer, and of course your bottom line financially.

Understanding that the upfront investment will be a little higher than anticipated, and not initially recognized as a necessity, stay focused on the idea that Safety Pays. It may take a little extra time, but it can save a life or limb. It shows you care. In the long run, you'll see that safety does work side by side with production in improving productivity.

Thank you. I'll be happy to answer any questions.