Plant Nursery Worker Safety Meeting Kit



Nursery workers plant, cultivate, and harvest trees, shrubs, or plants at garden centers, greenhouses, and agricultural fields.

COMMON HAZARDS FOR PLANT NURSERY WORKERS

1. Manual Handling. The number one injury causing hazard is manual handling.

Manual handling can generally be split into two groups, those that have an immediate impact and include high force movements such as pushing and pulling trolleys, loading, and unloading bulky items as well as lifting, carrying and restraining loads. The second group consists of low impact, but repetitive movement such as potting or pruning. Repetitive movement can cause damage involving overextending or attempting to move heavy items can cause gradual wear and tear on your body down. Being static for long periods of time can have a negative impact on your posture.

2. Hazardous Substances. Use of chemicals in horticulture is common. When you fail to handle, store, and dispose of hazardous chemicals appropriately, you are risking illness and sometimes even death. This exposure to hazardous chemicals is often a preventable situation in plant nurseries and most horticultural workplaces. What is classified as a hazardous chemical or substance? Generally, it is any material or mixture that can put a person at risk, this can include insecticides, herbicides, fuels, and cleaners. Exposure to these hazards can come in the form of vapours, liquids, and gases that can be corrosive and toxic.

As part of your hazardous chemical administrative process, you should ensure anyone using chemicals has received training in their safe use and maintain a digital Chemical Manifest for tracking. Maintain your chemical manifest in a digital system that can be accessed anywhere. Don’t risk losing your paper Safety Data Sheets, save them and link to the digital copy. A chemical inventory will allow you to access a list as well as usage, location of use and weather conditions when spraying, etc.

When maintaining your chemical manifest, you must include a copy or link to the relevant manufacturers current Safety Data Sheet (SDS). The SDS must provide information on the hazardous chemical including ingredients, health and emergency response procedures, safe handling as well as transportation, storage, and disposal.

3. UV Exposure. Exposure to UV as well as heat, is one of the hazards in horticulture that needs addressing.

When you think of heat-related illnesses your mind will picture heat stroke and exhaustion, fainting, heat rash or cramps, but heat can impact your ability to concentrate, and it also affects how your body absorbs chemicals.

No matter whether your workers are indoors or outdoors, heat can cause severe health and safety issues. However, when working outdoors ultra-violet radiation (UVR) is a real threat that should be managed. Damage caused by UVR is permanent, but there are several preventions and protective methods that can be utilised. It is recommended that when outdoors, workers should wear sun safe PPE made of suitable material. This includes a broadbrimmed or legionnaires hat, wrap-around sunglasses, long sleeved shirts with collars, trousers and at least SPF 30+, broad-spectrum sunscreen.

4. Machinery & Equipment. With the aim to make your workplace safer and work easier, you may use plant, machinery, and equipment to assist with tasks. This could include forklifts, mobile/powered nursery benches, pot handlers, trailers, and power tools.

Workers need to be trained in the correct use of each piece of machinery and equipment. Only licenced operators should use a forklift. There is also a real risk of a forklift tip-over if overloaded or unstable. Identifying safety controls needs to be part of your S.A.F.E. process to manage risks. Plant machinery and equipment should have correct machine guarding over moving parts or areas where a person could be injured –incorporate this as part of safety controls.

5. Biological Hazards. Bacteria that can cause pneumonia, is one of the real risks and a biological hazard in gardening. Biological hazards can be present when handling potting mix, compost, fertilisers, and soil. These mixtures can also cause irritation, allergic reactions and respiratory problems as dust and loose particles become airborne and inhaled.

To provide adequate protection, your workers need to be supplied with gloves and a disposable, industrial dust mask. Consider implementing best practices such as wetting down soil before use and thoroughly washing your hands after coming in to contact with possible contaminants.

6. Last but not least – Slips, Trips, Falls. The risk of slips, trips and falls can be managed with simple housekeeping measures, such as keeping your walkways clear of obstructions such as tools, cabling, or loose mats, ensuring wet or greasy spills are cleaned up promptly and making sure your workers are wearing adequate footwear for their working conditions.

BEST PLANT NURSERY WORKER SAFE EQUIPMENT PRACTICES

Before using any equipment in the nursery, workers must make sure that:

- The machine is in good working condition.
- It has proper guarding on moving parts.
- How much tape, string and wire is holding the machine together? Remove and fix properly.

- Warning devices and emergency stop controls are in place, working and can be accessed easily. Do you have a reporting or NCR system to record issues?
- Operators should be trained and have work cover cards for specialized equipment and processes e.g. forklift, bobcat, chemical spraying, confined spaces etc.
- Manufacturer’s instructions and guide should be readily available and followed.
- The equipment should be maintained according to the manufacturer’s specifications.

FINAL WORD

As employers, your staff’s safety should be one of your priorities. Moreover, proper handling and maintenance of nursery equipment can also mean a safe and healthy workplace. This can lead to a productive and better working environment and experience for everyone including your customers.