

Preventing Repetitive Motion Injuries in Interior Plantscaping

Employees working in the interior plantscaping industry are often exposed to ergonomics-related risk factors such as lifting heavy items, bending, reaching overhead, pushing, pulling heavy loads, working in awkward body postures, and performing the same or similar task repetitively. The physically demanding tasks such as pruning, lifting and carrying, performed over and over throughout the day, may be responsible for the musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), also known as repetitive stress injuries, repetitive strain injuries, repetitive motion injuries or cumulative trauma disorders.

There are ways to prevent and reduce the number and severity of these types of injuries.

Common root causes of interior plantscaping repetitive motion injuries include the following:

- Lifting and carrying watering cans
- Pouring water out of watering cans
- Pruning with hand pruners
- Pushing watering machines
- Using hose wands with hand triggers
- Using sprayers with hand triggers
- Climbing a ladder
- Working in an awkward posture, such as bending, kneeling or squatting for a prolonged time

Ways to prevent repetitive motion injuries include the following:

- Perform conditioning exercises before performing a repetitive task. Pre-work stretching and strengthening exercises are highly recommended. Warming up prepares your body for the physical work ahead and helps reduce the risk of repetitive motion injuries.
- Exercise on a regular basis to strengthen joints and muscles. Being in good physical shape will help your body to better endure repetitive motions and to prevent injuries.
- Take frequent breaks from repetitive motion tasks, rotate to other tasks, and take frequent stretch breaks to avoid overusing muscles. Taking time to stop for a short mini-break to stretch and relieve muscle tension will allow you to do more work with much less fatigue, especially at the end of the day. This will also reduce the risk of developing repetitive motion injuries.
- Vary your body posture so that you do not stay in the same position for a long time. Stand with feet shoulder-width apart, one foot slightly in front of the other. Shift weight from foot to foot, when standing and bending for long periods.
- Make sure your back is straight at all times, no matter what type of repetitive task you are doing. Avoid twisting of the back to reduce strain to the spine. Turn feet and arms to reach for objects rather than twisting your back.
- Instead of watering cans, use mechanical tools such as watering machines designed to ease the muscle tension related to repetitive tasks. Keep all tools properly maintained.
- Use manual and mechanical wheeled devices for carrying bulky and heavy loads. These devices can include dollies, utility carts and hand trucks.
- Do not lift bulky loads or those weighting more than 35 pounds without assistance, when performing repetitive lifting.
- Never change your grip during a lift unless you can support the weight somehow during the grip change.

- For spraying tasks performed for long time periods, use spray nozzles, which are designed to minimize hand force and keep the wrist in a straight position. Provide pistol grip handles for hand spraying and avoid single-finger activation, especially using the index finger.
- Choose the proper ladder for the intended task and inspect it before stepping on the first rung. Make sure the ladder has been well maintained.
- Face the ladder when climbing a ladder. While on the ladder, don't overextend your reach. Make sure you keep your weight evenly distributed.
- Don't carry equipment while climbing a ladder. Invest in a tool belt or have someone hand the equipment to you.

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