



While injuries from motor vehicles are less common than the others, they tend to be among the most severe (second only to falls from elevation).

PHOTO COURTESY SAIF

Preventing nursery injuries

Read SAIF's tips for staying safe on the job

BY CHRISTINA DYKES

AS A SENIOR SAFETY management consultant at SAIF, a not-for profit workers' compensation insurance company in Oregon, I work with policyholders every day to assess their workplace safety and offer guidance on how to make workers safer on the job.

I get to spend a lot of time with nurseries in the Willamette Valley and know how risky the work can be. The good news is, high-risk injuries can be prevented.

We looked at claims data from the past five years to uncover the five most dangerous workplace injuries in nurseries. We analyzed the most expensive claims, as a high cost is generally associated with a longer recovery period and more time-loss days, indicating more severe injuries.

Sprains and strains

The most common claim SAIF received for nurseries was for sprains or strains, with more than 800 claims. These

injuries are often caused by lifting equipment, plant materials, moving containers in the fields, or lifting products into racking systems.

To prevent these injuries, bring items up to elbow height and use mechanical tools such as forklifts where possible. When mechanical tools are not available it's critical that your employees use safe lifting techniques. This includes keeping their elbows in close when they lift and bending with their knees.

When you're in a hurry, it's easy to just lean over to grab things in a poor posture, but that can easily cause an injury. It's important that you teach your employees how to lift heavy items safely.

Slips, trips, and falls

SAIF received more than 500 claims related to slips, trips, or falls, costing \$8.5 million. The most severe of these are falls from an elevation of four feet or more. Typically, this includes ladders but, for some nurseries, it also includes loading docks.

To prevent falls, make sure your loading dock is chained and guarded. When a

vehicle comes up to the dock, make sure the sides are protected so people can't fall off.

It's important to look for, and correct, work surfaces that may increase the likelihood of a slip or fall. It's important to address standing water, uneven ground that can be leveled, and traction on footwear.

Keep hoses and other trip hazards out of walkways where possible. There are many methods for avoiding hoses in walkways, such as installing and using hose reels, raising hoses above walking surfaces, or investing in automatic systems that reduce the need for hoses.

If your employees work with ladders, make sure they know the right ladder to use for each job and have that ladder available and close by. Not all ladders are created equal for all tasks and a variety of ladder types may be needed. Always use three points of contact to maximize stability, by using two hands and one foot or two feet and one hand on the ladder. We have several resources at [SAIF.com/Ladders](https://www.saif.com/Ladders) to help with talking points like ladder selection, set-up, storage, and maintenance.



Preventing nursery injuries

Being struck

Another common incident in a nursery is getting struck by something during work. This could be from tools in the workspace, moving equipment, or another employee moving things nearby. While there is a lot happening at any given time, it's important to take time to analyze hazard potential and keep the workspace as clear as possible. The heavier the equipment, the higher potential for a more serious injury.

Motor vehicles

From tractors to ATVs, golf carts to forklifts, nurseries use many motor vehicles. While injuries from motor vehicles are less common than the others we've looked at, they tend to be among the most severe (second only to falls from elevation).

When you're working with a motor vehicle, pay attention to blind corners where co-workers may be entering the

path. Take special care when crossing or traveling on busy roads and take time to drive at safe speeds, especially over uneven surfaces and hillsides. Make sure your employees are trained on proper tractor and forklift use and consider additional training and accountability for all drivers.

Cuts and punctures

With pruning scissors and shears, cuts and punctures are a common nursery injury. Plants can be sharp, too!

Employees should know when, where and why proper personal protective equipment (PPE) like gloves and eyewear are required. Strategies like offering variety in type and choice of design can help PPE use become consistent along with support and modeling of the PPE by leadership.

Care is needed when new tools such as electric or automated pruners are introduced, as new tools can also introduce new hazards. Review where additional guarding, training or PPE may be needed anytime new equipment is added.

Well-being

It's important to think about your employees' well-being as part of your safety program. For example, as people get into production mode, it's even more important to pay attention to things like fatigue and ensuring your employees are getting good sleep.

In addition, nurseries require a lot of detailed work, so it's important for workers to take micro-breaks. Even doing something different for 30-60 seconds will give the muscles and mind some time to recover.

You can find more information about workplace safety and health, including talking points for your safety committees, free posters, and trainings, at SAIF.com.

A five-step approach to worker well-being

The well-being of employees is a crucial part of a successful business, but achieving worker well-being is more complicated. What if we could boil it down to five easy steps?

SAIF, in collaboration with the Center

for Work, Health, and Well-being at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, has created a simple five-step approach that merges safety, health, and well-being through organizational, environmental, and individual perspectives resulting in an integrated set of solutions.

The process is designed to be useful to all types and sizes of businesses. Begin the process with an exploration of your own business and to engage workers by asking questions.

Then you can hit the ground running:

- 1. Identify:** Build a strong team with clear direction and leadership support to positively impact workplace well-being.
- 2. Engage:** Engage your workforce and provide opportunities to share experiences, perspectives, and ideas for improvement of their working conditions.
- 3. Design:** What are you going to do, how will you do it, and what will success look like?
- 4. Action:** Do the things you've planned. What has worked well in the past? What are possible barriers that have not been addressed? Start small, stay focused, and make sure to track your progress.
- 5. Review:** Review your work and the lessons you've learned so you can continue to improve.

You can learn all about the five steps, watch trainings and videos, and download materials at SAIF.com/5EasySteps. The resources are also available in Spanish at TinyURL.com/SAIF5StepsSpanish. ©

Christina Dykes has worked as a safety management consultant with SAIF for over 14 years. She has a degree in exercise science and previous experience as a personal trainer. Some of her areas of specialty include agriculture, strain/sprain prevention, total worker health, young worker safety, and most recently a leadership role in SAIF's development of serious injury and fatality resources. She is passionate about her work with businesses to prevent injuries and enjoys working with business owners to make safety engaging and fun.



**BIRINGER
NURSERY**

Wholesale Growers of
Fruit, Flowering, Shade
Trees and Deciduous Shrubs

Frost Peach ®
Hanna's Heart ® Katsura

Growing since 1974

360-848-5151
FAX 360-848-5959

Mount Vernon, WA

www.BiringerNursery.com