



BE ON ALERT

Train for uncommon but high-risk exposures



By MICHAEL WAGNER, CSP, ASM

While working in the snow and ice management industry, you may be exposed to a variety of safety hazards that pose a threat to your personal health and well-being. Today we're not talking about equipment incidents, operational errors, or slippery pavement; we will address the need to be aware of additional exposures to risks like drugs, guns, alcohol, violence, and even urban hazards. Specific roles may be more exposed than others, and it's important to have a general understanding of how you must handle these situations.

Urban hazards

The first of these kinds of risks are urban hazards, which can include working on sites and properties where you are exposed to hazards like needles, drugs, weapons and working near homeless encampments. Many of these risks can be avoided or greatly reduced if you are aware of your surroundings:

- Visually inspect the area or site before, during and after work is completed.
- Listen for noise, commotion and people that may be onsite or in hidden

areas where personnel isn't performing snow and ice operations.

- Be careful when using your hands to clear, clean or pick up any objects.

Diligence

General awareness and observation of the site and objects on the site is one of the best preventive measures. Another important tip is to never work alone on sites. Sometimes this may be challenging; but in most cases when it comes to snow and ice operations, plow drivers, equipment operators, walkway crews, or even site supervisors will be on hand. It is important to be aware of who is working with you and your response methods in case an incident arises. Having additional help on site can aid in:

- Fewer people approaching you because you're not alone.
- Help to provide first aid and seek medical attention if a personal injury occurs from accidentally being cut, poked or hurt by another person.
- Reporting incidents and confirming information through eyewitnesses or additional victims.

Urban hazards are everywhere, and knowing what to look for provides greater preparedness in the event of an incident.

Weapons

Of the many exposures, one of the more frequent findings is firearms on site or potentially inside vehicles and

equipment. If you happen to find a firearm or weapon inside a company-owned asset, make sure you know your organization's policy for handling the issue, and do not touch the weapon.

You must advise the correct authority within your organization to handle the situation, as well as to ensure the safety of others. On the other hand, if a weapon is found on a client's property, or you come into contact with one not on company property, it is important to contact immediate supervisors and local authorities so it can be properly handled. If you find a weapon on a site, do not touch the weapon and instead let the authorities gain possession of it the way they need to.

Drug awareness

Another possible finding is drugs. With the many possibilities and varieties of drugs, it's challenging to know what to look for, as well as the places drugs may be, and how to properly report it. If you find any suspicious contents, chemicals, bags or storage containers, you should not handle them until the proper authorities arrive, as well as any other authoritative person or company with the ability to do so safely.

If you find drugs in company vehicles and equipment, you must immediately alert supervisors, who will identify the proper company to come and test the interior surfaces of the vehicle, as well as any other

chemicals or materials that may have been found.

What makes the contamination so difficult to handle is that many drugs are oil-based, and those oils soak into porous materials. Coming in contact with chemicals such as methamphetamines or fentanyl can be extremely harmful or even fatal.

Typically states have specific rules and processes that must be followed to ensure that the proper sanitation of vehicles has taken place to keep drivers safe from exposure to harmful chemicals.

Alcohol preparedness

A more common hazard you may be exposed to is alcohol in the workplace, which can include finding alcohol in vehicles and equipment, in the company yard or facilities, or on a job site.

It is important to confiscate it immediately wearing PPE such as gloves and even safety glasses, and report it to your supervisor, safety personnel, or the human resources department. Although this may seem like a strong reaction, you don't know where it came from, who has consumed it, or what the contents are.

Following this, the handling of employees that are under the suspicion of using alcohol before or at work must be done appropriately; and you should notify the same personnel that can properly manage the situation.

Determining if an employee is using alcohol at work can create volatile situations, and this should be left to trained employees who can properly manage stress, drug testing and reporting, as well as potential disciplinary action or termination. Whether an employee is suspected of usage due to the smell of alcohol on their breath or open containers in a vehicle, any situation can escalate quickly depending on the circumstances.

Better safe than sorry

When you consider the different exposures and circumstances discussed here, you can see how employees such as field staff, mechanics, or supervisors traveling to and from sites can all be exposed to this variety of hazards.

It is important to know how to observe and be aware of your surroundings, as well as understand how to prepare yourself for a possible incident response effort to manage it properly and safely and get assistance from the designated company personnel.

Nobody in the industry is exempt

from potentially being involved in one of these scenarios, so take the time to prepare yourself and keep you and those you work around safe. **SB**

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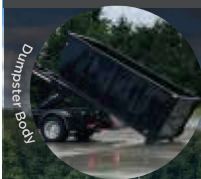
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