

## Landscape Safety Series: Preventing Back Injuries<sup>1</sup>

Lance Fluegel and Bradley Rein<sup>2</sup>

### THINGS YOU CAN DO ON THE JOB

- Never attempt any lifting until your body is warm and loose. Perform some simple stretching and warm-up exercises if necessary.
- Do not attempt to lift heavy or bulky items alone. Ask co-workers to help you if available.
- Use mechanical lifting devices to lift and/or move heavy items such as trees, shrubs, sod, rocks, statuary, etc. Tractor loaders, skid-steer loaders, fork lifts, wagons, wheelbarrows, etc., often are found on job sites -- use them if available.
- Slide heavy plants or materials if possible rather than attempting to lift them with your body. Pushing the object is safer than pulling it to the desired location. Planks and rollers can make this job still easier.
- Storing materials at least 12 inches off the ground, where possible, minimizes the danger of one of the most hazardous movements -- lifting directly from the ground.
- Avoid lifting in a situation where the body will be twisted. Avoid jerking or erratic motions.
- Never try to catch heavy falling objects.

### USE THESE TECHNIQUES WHEN LIFTING

- Keep the feet parted for greater stability and lifting power.
- Keep the back straight to keep the spine, back muscles, and inner organs in correct alignment. This will minimize the chance of a hernia.
- Tuck the chin to keep the neck, head, and spine straight.

- Grip the object with the whole hand for more lifting power.
- Keep arms and elbows tucked in for more gripping power.
- Center your body over your feet for balance and lifting power.
- Bend your legs and then lift the object by straightening the legs. Your leg muscles will now take the load instead of your back.
- Reverse the procedure to lower an object.

### HELPFUL THINGS YOU CAN DO OFF THE JOB

- Follow a regular exercise program but see a doctor first for a checkup and advice.
- Some sports are excellent conditioning for the back. Swimming, cycling, jogging, walking, and rowing are considered to be good for the back. Golf, bowling, racquet sports, football, baseball and weight lifting are of more risk since they involve more rapid start and stop movements, twists, and turns.

### IF YOU DO SUFFER A BACK INJURY

- Assume a comfortable position immediately. Lying down is usually best.
- Apply ice packs to the pain area.
- Get medical treatment.
- Notify your employer.

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2. Lance Fluegel, Safety Coordinator, and Bradley Reid, Engineering Specialist, the College of Agriculture, the University of Arizona, Tucson AZ 85719.