

TOOLBOX TALK #29

OPERATING EQUIPMENT SAFELY

When it comes to operating equipment, safety should be at the forefront of every stakeholder's mind, including business owners, managers and operators themselves. Those who know and understand how to safely use equipment have the ability to work faster and more efficiently, leading to better overall performance and profitability. Knowing how to properly use equipment can also help reduce the risk of injuries to operators or others on jobsites. Building a safety mindset requires a shared responsibility at all levels, proper training, daily integration, continuous improvement and positive reinforcement. A safety culture starts with management and operational staff members who treat safety and health as an investment, not a cost, and who value as well as demonstrate model behaviors. Also, employees who know how to properly use their equipment and follow manufacturers' recommendations are more likely to use more safely and efficiently.

Safety is always being refined and continuously improved upon, so dedicating time and resources will help strengthen areas as well as define strategies that can positively impact safety performance. Positive reinforcement – by celebrating and acknowledging efforts – is another key aspect that goes hand-in-hand with continuous improvement. Knowing how a machine works, realizing a machine's capabilities and limitations, and exercising appropriate behavior inside and around the machine can help minimize the risk of accidents.

Some universal guidelines that can be used for all machines include:

- Consult the Operation and Maintenance Manual before operating any type of equipment.
- Follow instructions on machine safety signs to avoid situations that can cause serious injuries or even death.
- Wear tight-fitting clothing that cannot get caught on working components or controls inside and outside of the machine.
- Always face the machine when getting in, and grab handles and use steps that are provided for a three-point contact.
- Fasten the seatbelt.
- Pay attention to warning lights and gauges.
- Never attempt to start the engine or operate the controls from outside the machine.
- Look to the rear first before backing up and check each side before swinging or turning the machine.
- Run at low speed until the operator is comfortable with using the machine.
- Never allow riders on the machine.
- Keep all body parts inside the machine while it is running.
- Be aware of jobsite traffic patterns or potential hazards.
- Make sure proper ventilation is provided if working in an enclosed area or building.
- Move slowly uphill or downhill, with the heaviest part of the machine uphill. (When loaders are empty, the heaviest part may be the rear of the machine.)
- Avoid sudden stops or turns, steep slopes or drop-offs, rocks, culverts and stumps.
- Stop the machine on level ground when finished on a jobsite. Always lower the booms, lift arms, buckets and attachments before exiting the machine.
- Engage the parking break and stop the engine before leaving the unit with the three-point contact exit strategy.