



**Arborist Safety and Training Programs  
Lifeline to successful operations**

In most industries in the world today, safety and training are keys to success. The tree care industry is no exception!

Whether a Utility, Municipal, Institutional or Commercial Arborist, the very nature of our work means that we must deal with risk on the job. Safety is a relative term. Arborist Safety means risk management. This means intentionally forming good habits while systematically replacing bad habits.

I have been working in the tree care industry since the mid-70's. For the first 10 years or so, I gained about 90% of my knowledge and skill either from on the job experience or from my co-workers. I learned many important things on the job. However, I also picked up some very questionable idea's. It really was not until the mid-80's, when I entered my first tree climbing competition that I realized how much I could learn through interaction with other industry professionals.

Because of the fact that most tree workers tend to work in semi-isolation, learning a more advanced technique can be very challenging. Unless we make an effort to become involved, we risk becoming completely out of touch with modern technology. I won my first International Tree Climbing Competition in 1991. Since then I have been working extensively with tree climbers, riggers, and chain saw operators from all over North America and much of Europe. It's fascinating to see human ingenuity at work around the world. Tree workers are finding innovative solutions to common challenges on the job every day. By sharing information we have the opportunity to collaborate in the advancement of industry techniques and equipment.

In recent years we have seen the introduction of many interesting techniques and new equipment to help meet the challenges of working in the Urban Forests. Over the years I have enjoyed introducing hundreds (perhaps thousands) of Arborists to new ideas through seminars and demonstrations. I see eye's light up with excitement over the prospect of one's work becoming safer, easier, and more efficient. Arborists can attend many different types of programs, watch video tapes or read a variety of trade magazines and publications to get a look at advances in Arboriculture. There will always be an important place for these methods of exchanging information!

It's very exciting to see the industry blossom. However, it can also be very intimidating to see things change so quickly.

Therefore, it is important to recognize the difference between, being introduced to techniques in seminars, trade magazines etc., and taking part in a training program.

There is a learning curve that comes with the introduction of any new technique. Too often a worker will become frustrated and give up long before he has a chance to master a new skill. The most effective way to deliver practical information to tree workers is through hands on, interactive training sessions. Proper training starts on solid ground with safety first. Training should encourage, and teach the student to "plan the work and work the plan". Proper training empowers the student with a thorough understanding rather than sketchy, abstract idea's. The more completely an instructor is able to impart a given technique, the greater the likelihood of the student being able to incorporate a new skill safely and effectively.

A sensible well-balanced curriculum taught by a knowledgeable, experienced instructor is key. It is important not to inundate the student with too much information at one time.

Practice is a very important element. The students must use what they have learned as soon as possible, or they begin to lose it. The goal should be to build confidence and enhance the student's productivity through more consistent results. A more professional attitude is inevitable. Everyone wins!

Kudos!

Ken Palmer  
President, ArborMaster®