

SAFELY SPEAKING

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Protecting volunteers

Local governments are relying on volunteers to do more and more in their communities due to increasing budget constraints. In addition, the governor's office recently launched a new effort called Volunteer Iowa: A Call to Service. The goal of this program is to expand volunteerism and move Iowa from second to first in the nation for volunteerism.

There is no question that volunteers perform many valuable services for their communities. So it is understandable that organizations benefiting from those services may want to offer the volunteers some level of protection if injured while volunteering.

Before discussing this further, it is important to understand that volunteers fall into two categories. The first is comprised of volunteers who, according to Iowa law, are considered eligible for workers' compensation benefits. This includes volunteer firefighters, volunteer emergency responders, reserve peace officers and elected officials. IMWCA uses the term *statutory volunteers* to describe volunteers in this category. Due to the vital and necessary services they provide their communities, these volunteers are considered employees by the workers' compensation statute, even though they receive little or no compensation.

The second category includes all other volunteers who receive no compensation and by law are not eligible for workers' compensation benefits. This category is primarily to whom the opening paragraph is referring. IMWCA describes these as *non-statutory volunteers*. Since they are not eligible for any insurance benefits from the entity for whom they are volunteering, IMWCA created an endorsement that can be added to members' workers' compensation policies that provides medical-only coverage.

This *Non-Statutory Volunteer Medical-Only Coverage Endorsement* provides coverage for medical benefits only, up to a maximum of \$25,000 or two years from the date of injury, whichever occurs first. The coverage is secondary to any other personal health insurance the volunteer may have and is intended to cover deductibles, co-insurance and other medical costs that may not be covered by their own health insurance. In essence, holding them financially harmless for injuries they may incur while volunteering. In case the volunteer has no other insurance, the endorsement becomes primary up to the limits.

Additional information about the endorsement is available by contacting imwcainfo@iowaleague.org.

Brush, tree trimming safety

Distractions like high noise levels, moving equipment and traffic flow through the work zone pose risks to crews performing brush and tree trimming operations. With the onset of fall, let's take a few moments to remember to be safe while performing these tasks.

First, a work zone must be established to protect the workers, equipment and the traveling public from injury and property damage. The type of work zone will depend on the type of work being performed.

If cutting and dropping brush or limbs in the ditch or along the edge of a road but not removing the brush or limbs, a rolling type of work zone is acceptable. Proper signs should also be posted at each end of the work zone. If employees are not working on the traveled portion of the roadway, trucks and other equipment with strobe beacons engaged should be parked along the edge of road to form a barrier between traffic and the workers in the ditch.

If brush and limbs are placed on the road surface for cutting, chipping or hauling, the safest thing to do is to close the road or street to through traffic. This provides the highest level of protection to the workers and the traveling public. Temporary barricades should be placed at the intersections nearest the work area and should include signage for a temporary detour to route traffic away from the work zone. Trucks and other equipment should also be used as barriers in this situation in the event someone runs the barricades. If a satisfactory detour is not possible, a work zone should be established with flaggers and traffic control devices like cones. For specific information about establishing work zones see the *Uniform Traffic Control Devices Manual*.

In addition to signs and barricades, it is also essential that employees wear high visibility clothing whenever they

work on or along streets or roads. Even with traffic control devices, it is imperative that workers wear high visibility clothing.

Another consideration when clearing or trimming brush and trees in the right-of-way is the proximity of power lines. In many areas power lines still run along or over right-of-ways. The Iowa Occupational Safety and Health Administration rule is no cutting if ANY part of the tree or brush is within 10 feet of a power line, unless the operator has the proper training and equipment. If the crew does not have the required training and equipment, the power company should be notified and the power to the line shut off until the work is complete.

Finally, when trimming trees in the right-of-way, make sure proper equipment is used. Bucket trucks with fall protection should always be used to perform elevated work. Front end loaders and ladders set up in truck boxes are not appropriate for this type of work.

For fiscal year
2011-2012 IMWCA
members experi-
enced approximate-
ly 300 slip and fall
claims resulting in
about \$1.4 million
in expenses. Ouch!

Slip & Trip
Trivia

Newsletter changes coming

Beginning in January 2013, the IMWCA Informer will be published monthly with a Safely Speaking section devoted to safety issues. We reviewed readership lists of each publication over the last few years and realized that the majority of readers have been subscribing to both. So it made sense to us to combine the two into one monthly newsletter that will address a wider variety of issues in each edition.





Clean chimney before winter, avoid unwanted fires

Soon the weather will be turning, and those with fireplaces know that a nice warm fire can be comforting and an enjoyable source of heat on a cold day. One important thing to remember, though, is to make sure the chimney is clean. When creosote builds up in the fireplace, it can lead to a chimney fire. Leaves and other debris can get trapped, and also birds, squirrels and other critters sometimes make nests in the chimney. Not only is there a risk of fire, but blockages in the chimney can prohibit smoke from escaping properly and cause a buildup of carbon monoxide in your home. So it's essential to make sure it is clean before the burning season.

How to check for creosote build-up:

- First, make sure there is no downdraft from the chimney. If there is, open a door or window on the same floor so that the draft stops or goes the other way, up the chimney.
- Wear goggles and a disposable dust mask.
- Using a flashlight and the fireplace poker, scratch the black surface above the smoke chamber. If the

groove you create is very thin, no cleaning is needed. If the groove is 1/8 inch thick, then schedule a cleaning soon, and if it is 1/4 inch thick or more then do not use the fireplace until it is cleaned.

The easiest creosote to remove is the light grey, brown or black. Other, more difficult to remove creosote can have a tar-like coating, or even a shiny glaze.

It is ideal to have your chimney professionally cleaned by a company that is certified by the Chimney Safety Institute of America. You can also clean your chimney yourself between professional visits if desired. Several Web sites provide a step-by-step process and/or video demonstrating exactly how to clean your chimney.

Sources:

www.familyhandyman.com/DIY-Projects/Home-Safety/Fire-Safety/when-to-clean-a-chimney-flue/View-All

www.repair-home.com/chimneys/how-to-clean-a-chimney.html

Brush burning safety tips

In anticipation of winter, tree and brush trimming activities have increased around the state. While many crews have chipped a large amount of brush and limbs, many other crews pile and burn the larger stuff. Before running out and putting a match to the pile, remember these basic safety tips.

First, before burning, check the weather to ensure wind conditions are low and in the right direction. The prolonged dry conditions have made most areas susceptible to ignition. Any significant gust of wind can push fire cinders in all directions and cause an uncontrollable blaze in a hurry. Monitor the weather throughout the burn's duration.

Second, prepare the area for burning. Mow or disk around the burn pile to minimize the chance that the fire can move beyond the pile.

Third, have several fire extinguishers or water hoses ready and continually monitor the burn. It's also advis-

able to notify the local fire departments of your burn before you start.

Fourth, anyone monitoring burn sites should wear appropriate clothing that is suitable for working near fires. For example, coveralls soaked in fuel or oil are not suitable. Clean, heavy denim pants and jackets along with leather boots are recommended. Check yourself often to ensure embers aren't attached to clothing.

Fifth, inspect the burn pile to ensure nothing explosive or hazardous has been hidden or added to the pile, and have at least two people present when igniting the burn.

Finally, do not use gas as an accelerant. Use diesel or other fuels with lower flash points to prevent explosions during ignition.

Following these steps and using good judgment can help avoid injuries as well as major property damage.

Check out the
IMWCA blog,
Today @ IMWCA

Post a comment or a question related to any of the topics. Or ask a question on a topic about which you would like more information. It is our hope that this will become a useful tool for exchanging ideas and information among IMWCA members and with League staff.