



AMTOPP News



Spring - April 2021

President's Message Happy spring AMTOPP members!



I'm sure that all of you are itching to get out and get started on the year; I know all of us on the board

have been ready for spring since winter started! Hopefully you were able to get all of your winter work done and prepared for the springtime before it actually hit. It always seems like I am already behind in my work for the season by the time it arrives, but nonetheless I can't wait for the sunshine and warm weather to get here.

Your board of directors is hard at work getting the year lined up, and we are planning on having a few events throughout the year to hold everyone over until conference time. We are currently working with Ascension Group Northwest to put together an aerial rescue course that will be held in Missoula. Right now the date and location are pending; stay tuned for more details! Keep in mind that the aerial rescue course is a required component of the EHAP training

that was put on in Billings in January, so any of you that were able to participate in that training will want to get in on the course to be able to submit your EHAP certification.

We also are planning a small field day a bit earlier than we have in the past; following our April board meeting we will be heading to the Station Foundation in Bozeman. While we are limited in number due to the ongoing COVID pandemic, we thought it was important to continue our tradition of volunteering for the community. While this location is new to us this year, we are happy to be able to help this organization as they help Special Ops service members reintegrate after tours overseas. If you have interest in lending a hand, please let either myself or another of the board members for more information.

Also keep in mind that Saluting Branches is still scheduled to be held this September. While this is quite a ways out, please mark your calendars for this event which always proves to be enlightening and enriching. While Saluting Branches was not able to be held last year, let's all make a point of showing up and making this the best one yet!

On that note, planning for next year's conference is in full swing, assuming that there aren't any new COVID hiccups. Not having the conference this last year was a significant disappointment for everyone, so let's make the 2022 conference the best one on the books. We are planning a full docket of speakers and courses, so stay tuned for more information!

I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank every one of our corporate sponsors and members for hanging in there this last year and keeping AMTOPP alive. If it weren't for each and every one of you, this organization would not be able to keep afloat. Simply the fact that we have been able to keep going despite all the craziness from this last year is a testament to the integrity and communal nature of our industry.

As always, please remember that we are here for you and are happy to help in any way possible over this next year. Have a great Spring, and we will see you all before you know it!

Cooper Elwood

Safety In The Workplace - Tailgate Safety Time Is Worth It?

Short, frequent, safety-training sessions keep safety in the forefront of employee's daily routines. Employees remain interested, losses of production are minimized, and minimum preparation by the employer is needed. Frequent sessions keep safety on the minds of employees, demonstrate concern for the employee's well being and reduce the number of employee injuries.

In the United States, the green industries rank high in work-related fatalities. Many accidents involve some type of machinery or equipment. Most accidents are predictable and preventable. Illnesses and health problems can also occur easily — green industry work involves exposure to weather and natural hazards and dangerous chemicals. Workers in the green industries must learn and practice safe working habits.

Accidents Cost Time and Money

Accidents cause injuries and, sometimes, even death. They involve intangible losses. You will lose time while you recover. Medical and therapy bills will add up. Worst of all, you might not be able to work as you did before the accident. Safety is too expensive not to be

taken seriously. Accident costs reduce the profit margin. In the worst cases, accidents cost lives.

Why Risk Your Health?

A bee sting is unpleasant at least, and it can be fatal. Pesticides and caustic chemicals can cause long-term, serious health problems. Dust and mold can cause chronic lung problems. The hot summer sun can cause sun-stroke and heat exhaustion, and winter can cause frostbite. How can you avoid those health risks?

Safety Is Everyone's Responsibility

It is up to workers in the green industries to use safe working practices. All workers can contribute to each other's safety. Remember — machinery operators aren't the only ones who get hurt in accidents.

General Tips for a Safe Working Environment

- A good safety program starts with a safety status assessment.
- Make safety everyone's concern. This includes family, workers, visitors, and you.
- Be aware of what you are doing and your surroundings. Most

See Safety page 2

Quarterly Board Meeting to be held, Friday April 15, 2021, at 39 A Goldmine Lane, Belgrade. If you are interested in attending please notify the AMTOPP office. amtopp@amtopp.org or (406) 204-0100.

Safety, continued from page 1

injuries happen during routine, everyday tasks.

- Sometimes, you cannot handle a task alone. If you can't, ask for help.

- Take short rest breaks. Don't over-exert yourself — don't get so tired you get careless.

- Get plenty of sleep.

- Stay away from equipment if you are angry. Wait a little while until you cool down.

- Train new equipment operators before they work on their own.

- Read the operator's manual for all equipment.

- Wear the proper Personal Protection Equipment for everyday tasks and for specific jobs. You may need protective footwear with ankle support. You may also need close-fitting clothing.

A Safety Training Topic

Hand Signals for Vehicle Safety

The American Society of Agricultural Engineers has adopted 11 uniform hand signals for safety. All workers, including delivery drivers and other workers who are at the job site, should learn the 11 signals and use them. That way, everyone will communicate in the same "language."

- Demonstrate the signals in your tailgate presentation.

- Have someone else discuss how to perform the signal while you demonstrate the hand signal.

- Have workers practice them.

- You could post the hand signals in the coffee room or near a water fountain, and have them in the vehicle. This will allow employees to see the signals every day.

- Review the important points.

Hand signals are ideal for com-

munication around noise. Hand signals provide a way to communicate needed information effectively in a noisy environment. All workers should learn and use these signals.

Why Use Hand Signals?

- Hand signals save time.












- Hand signals prevent accidents.

- Hand signals reduce severity of injuries.

- Hand signals lower the risk of accidental death.

- Hand signals communicate well in noisy environments.

Information taken from The Ohio State University Extension College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences

			
Come to me	Move toward me	This far to go	Move out
Raise the arm vertically overhead, palm to the front, and rotate in large horizontal circles.	Point toward person(s), vehicle(s), unit(s); beckon by holding the arm horizontally to the front, palm up, and motioning toward the body.	Place palms at ear level, facing head, and move laterally inward to indicate remaining distance to go	Face the desired direction of movement; hold the arm extended to the rear; then swing it overhead and forward in the direction of desired movement until it is horizontal palm down.
			
Lower equipment	Raise equipment	Slow down	Start engine
Make circular motion with either hand pointing to the ground.	Make circular motion with either hand at head level.	Extend the arm horizontally sideward, palm down, and wave arm downward 45 degree minimum several times, keeping the arm straight. Do not move arm above horizontal.	Simulate cranking of vehicles by moving arm in circular motion at waist level.
			
Stop	Speed up	Stop engine	
Raise the hand upward to the full extent of the arm, palm to the front. Hold that position until the signal is understood.	Raise the hand to the shoulder, fist closed; thrust the fist upward to the full extent of the arm and back to the shoulder rapidly several times.	Draw either hand, palm down across the neck in a "throat-cutting motion."	



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An Eye On Business

They Did What?! - Conflict Resolution

By: Lydia Heser
Director

Have you ever had a conflict between employees on the job? This can make for a terrible day. It costs time, money, and relationships, which none of us want. Our company is a family-owned and operated business. We are literally all family, dad, mom, and five sons. We have had our share of conflict resolution. I am not claiming to be an expert, but I want to share some life lessons from our experiences. Most businesses are not all family, but the principles we have learned can still apply to any crew.

Respect is the key component; also, attitude and language are the areas where the conflict will surface. Friendly joking is OK, but it has gone too far when it turns to disrespect and criticism. If you have an employee that feels that he/she is above everyone around them, demanding respect for themselves but showing others disrespect will lead to conflict. Every position and job in a company plays an important role for a business to be successful. We as business owners know this, but the employees do not and assume the work they are doing is not important. If you can communicate the importance of the menial task to the person assigned to that, they will more than likely feel like they are an important part of the team, leading to a more cohesive team and productive day.

Don't micro-manage your team. When others are allowed to make decisions, they feel trusted. This builds respect and responsibility. If the boss has to make all the decisions, employees tend to have a harder time problem-solving. They should be expected to have to solve some problems on their own. However, it may be a good idea to set some perimeters on what sort of decisions should be run by the boss or manager. Decision-making authority is also built over time, with the employee showing good judgment and then giving more trust to make decisions.

An easily avoided but often overlooked reason for the conflict is pushing the crew too hard and not allowing for a break or when they are hungry and/or fatigued. When you have climbers in the tree or other setups that are not convenient to stop and start, it is tempting to work

past lunch or too late into the evening. This is when tempers tend to flare, and people tend to get hurt. Hopefully, you know the limits of your crew. It is important not to exceed this.

Even the best crews will run into conflict eventually. When this happens, be careful not to let anger build. The sooner the conflict is dealt with, the better. Don't let resentment build. Conflicts can't always be dealt with immediately, but they should be dealt with as soon as it is an opportune time. Some good principles we have found useful in dealing with conflict.

1. Hear both sides of the conflict. The first story always sounds right until the other side comes and challenges the first story. Both sides should feel like they had a chance to be heard.

2. Don't rush to conclusions. Sometimes a little investigation is worth the time. Also, give yourself some time to think through the situation. Emotions can blind you to obvious inconsistencies. Sometimes it takes time to come up with a good solution. The conflict doesn't need to be solved right away; just letting both sides know that you are working on a solution can go a long way to help.

3. Consider extenuating circumstances. Are there circumstances in someone's life that are causing them to be extra stressed? Sometimes a little compassion can go a long way in helping someone deal with a crisis in their life.

4. We have found that many of the conflicts arise out of misunderstandings. Personality differences can be a huge influence in these instances. There are many different personality tests you can use with your crew. It is helpful to know the strengths and weaknesses of different crew members. Some people are more natural risk-takers and move ahead boldly, while others are more detailed and slower in their approach. Knowing what personality types are working together and helping them understand each other can avoid conflict. Weakness in a personality type is not an excuse, but it is helpful to know that if you struggle with patience, then that area needs more effort. We have done a personality test with our family, and it has helped us manage who works together on what project. Knowing people's strengths and weaknesses allows us to give jobs based on what they will excel at. For example, we avoid putting our fast-paced, easily bored worker in a slow, tedious, detailed job and our slow-paced, detailed worker on a big tree felling job. Sometimes a job requires workers to do jobs they are not as comfortable with. It is good to expect some frustration and be ready to show more patience and grace that day. It is an exercise in futility to expect people to completely change their personalities. Learn to work within each worker's strengths and weaknesses and not fight against them.

Working as a team can make the most tedious of work enjoyable. As I said in the beginning, respect is the key in this endeavor, but forgiveness is the bookend. When conflict arises, we must work toward forgiveness. It helps to remember that each one of us has had to ask for forgiveness and needed forgiveness. As humans, we tend to judge others more harshly than ourselves. Be honest about what happened, and don't assume malice where stupidity can be accounted for. Having a crew that works well together not only makes the job more enjoyable, it can also make it safer, more efficient, and be more professional.



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Team Building: How to Conduct Performance Reviews Effectively

The thought of an annual performance review can fill you and your employees with dread.

However, if you implement performance reviews effectively, they can help you achieve your business goals.

While there should be an annual performance review, Steve Cesare, human resource expert with The Harvest Group, says that shouldn't be the only time you're meeting with your employees to discuss performance.

Cesare explains performance coaching should be an ongoing monthly conversation between a supervisor and an employee to keep people on track with their performance throughout the year.

"It's like if you only weigh yourself once a year, are you fat or skinny?" he says. "If you track yourself every month or every day or every week, you can be on a diet and be healthy all year round."

Cesare says by conducting these monthly check-ins you can make sure people are progressing and are on the right course. He says these monthly touchpoints also make sure there are no surprises for employees.

"Most people get surprised at the time of a performance review because they were never told that before," he says. "Employees don't like performance reviews because it becomes a game of gotcha."

Peak Landscape Inc., based in Truckee, California, is one of the companies that conducts monthly check-ins with their employees.

"Quarterly or yearly reviews allow poor performers to create bad habits that only become more difficult to fix because they were allowed to go unchecked for so long," says Ryan O'Connor, operations manager for Peak

Landscape.

The Performance Review Process

Performance reviews should contain the key drivers of success with various factor ratings to see if the employee is meeting performance expectations. The annual performance review should be formal and include documentation.

"A performance review is typically a narrative subjective evaluation that has a number attached to it," Cesare says.

In Peak Landscape's case, their performance review consists of 10 categories ranging from safety and communication to equipment and truck care and overall job performance and efficiency.

"We believe they are important for holding team members accountable while providing clear messaging on areas they are excelling and areas they need to improve," O'Connor says.

When to conduct an annual performance review depends on your company but Cesare advises his clients to do performance reviews in February. This is because the results from the previous year will be available. Taking the results from the previous year and comparing them to the goals set for that year you can see if your company did good or bad and then put together a business plan for the new year.

"By the end of January, we have our 2021 goals," Cesare says. "We should take those 2021 goals and trickle them down to the employee and say, 'This is what our company did last year."

This is what the goals were. So, here's what you did last year and here are your results,' so that way the company and the employees are all aligned at the same point in time."

Cesare says the rule of thumb as for how

long an annual performance review should take is an hour. They should be a summary of the monthly coaching sessions, which are typically 30 to 60 minutes.

"Make sure that they don't just become a sounding board to bash team members for everything they are doing wrong," O'Connor says. "Use them as an opportunity to point out the areas they are excelling."

Leaving a performance appraisal meeting, the supervisor should have an action plan for each employee to work on over the year. The action plan should be the agenda items for each month's one-on-one session.

"They have to have an action plan or development plan coming out of the performance review that the supervisor and the employee can focus on during each successive one-on-one meeting to make sure alignment occurs," Cesare says.

Overcoming the Negative Stigma

Supervisors often don't like doing performance reviews as giving negative feedback can feel confrontational. Cesare says one of the ways to remove the negative opinion of performance appraisals is to make supervisors more like coaches and less like auditors.

"Eventually the employees will see their supervisors as coaches, rather than disciplinarians who are simply there to audit them, and criticize them for something they did wrong," Cesare says. "An auditor will tell you what you did wrong. A coach will tell you what you did wrong and show you how to do it better."

Cesare says the key is coaching to help people become better, not just to show them their weaknesses.

See Reviews page 6



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By: Dr. Laurie Kerzicnik
Associate Extension Specialist II
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The Cicada Storm: Will Montana Be on the Map?

Cicadas are in the press, especially in the eastern United States. This is because a 17-year cycle of cicadas referred to as “brood X” is due to emerge this May in parts of Ohio, Indiana, Tennessee, Washington, and Maryland. Billions of cicadas will emerge from their underground dwellings. These are referred to as “periodical cicadas”, and there are three broods of 13-year cicadas and 12 broods of 17-year cicadas in the US (see map).

The periodical cicadas spend years underground feeding on plant and tree roots, causing minimal damage. When they emerge, they climb trees, males sing mating songs to attract females, and the females ultimately lay eggs on the branches of deciduous trees (some evergreens can be affected). Branch damage, breakage, or flagging of branch tips can occur from female egg laying in these areas.

In Montana, we do not have broods of periodical cicadas, so we won't be seeing billions of cicadas this summer. Montana currently has 17 documented species of annual cicadas (<https://www.cicadamania.com/cicadas/common-cicadas-of-montana/>), which are present in much smaller numbers. One species, Putnam's cicada, can cause some branch damage within the urban landscape but the other species are not known to cause significant damage to woody ornamentals. In 2020, Billings, Glendive, and surrounding areas had annual cicada populations that were higher than previous years. Additionally, some of the noteworthy cicada predators, cicada-killer wasps (a species of *Sphecius*), were reported and collected for the first time in several years in these same areas.

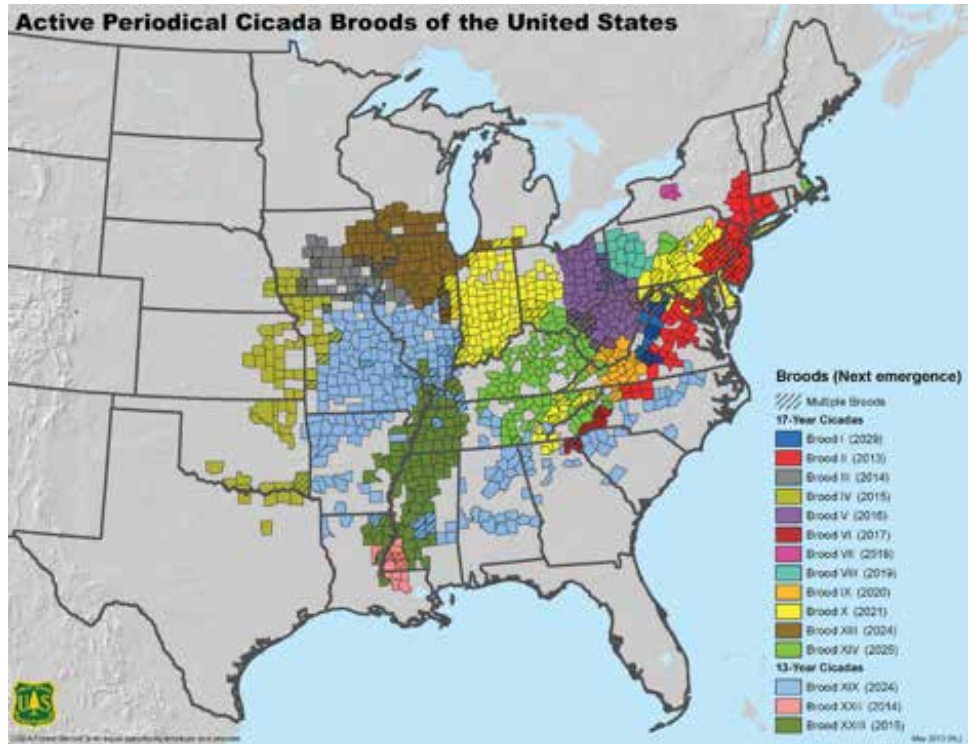


Figure 1. Periodical cicada map, courtesy of A. Liebhold, USDA Forest Service.



Figure 2.
Plains cicada.

Photo by W. Cranshaw, Bugwood.org

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"It's a process, it's not an event," he says.

Make sure employees know the goal of the performance reviews is developmental.

"The goal of performance reviews is to help people improve their performance so the company can achieve its business goals," Cesare says. "It's not a game of gotcha. It's not being condescending. It's not just lording over somebody like an auditor."

O'Connor adds that pointing out the positive aspects of an employee's performance can also help overcome the negative stigma of performance reviews.

Before conducting performance reviews, supervisors should be trained on how to conduct them properly.

"Because if you do something wrong on a performance review like saying the wrong thing or being discriminatory you could get sued," Cesare says.

Setting Realistic Goals and Offering Rewards

There are three types of goals you can set: empirical ones, process ones or cultural ones.

Empirical goals have numbers attached to them such as earn 10 more customers. Examples of process goals include arriving to work on time or turning in all paperwork by Thursday at noon. Cultural goals promote being a

team player, safety and other aspects that support your company culture.

Depending on the different jobs positions what goals you set for employees will vary.

O'Connor advises setting clear standards about what is expected at an employee's current level and what is expected to get to the next level.

"The primary issue is alignment," Cesare says. "We want to make sure that we align employee performance with departmental objectives and company results."

Cesare says while there are performance expectations people have to achieve, when employees reach goals or go beyond that, they should be given some type of incentive or bonus to reinforce it so that behavior happens again in the future.

"I think we all want money," Cesare says. "I think most of us like money. It's not everything, but it's very important to get in the world of work. Reinforcement is very important."

O'Connor agrees that team and individual goals should be recognized and celebrated throughout the season. Whether the reward is a one-time bonus or a pay increase depends upon the company, the culture and the economy as to what works best.

"If you're giving performance

reviews and bonuses, based on individual performances that are not connected to the organizational results, there's nothing feasible about that," Cesare says.

"It can't happen."

Opportunities to Improve

If an employee isn't performing properly, Cesare says the coaching should start immediately.

"There's no gestation period for performance, if you see somebody doing something right or wrong, praise them, or coach them immediately," Cesare says. "Don't wait for 30, 60 or 90 days."

O'Connor says they actively coach throughout the season and address any issues proactively as they arise.

"Waiting until the end of the season only reinforces the negative behaviors and sends a message that they are performing adequately," O'Connor says. "It's my job to let employees know when they are not performing up to our standards and give them a chance to improve."

We have had several long-term team members that have taken constructive criticism and went on to become valuable team members."

For performance reviews to be successful, Cesare says it comes down to alignment, achievement and accountability. The individual's, department's and company's

goals all must be aligned.

"We want our employees to achieve their goals so the company's results flourish, and that allows the employees to make more money," Cesare says.

As for accountability, Cesare says whether someone is good or bad or right or wrong, you have to hold them accountable and coach them to your standard to help them achieve the goals that keep the company alive.

Article taken from: NALP

<https://blog.landscapeprofessionals.org/team-building-how-to-conduct-performance-reviews-effectively/>



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