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From Forest Nursery Notes, Winter 2012

6. © Increasing nursery and greenhouse worker safety. Langlois, S., Coker, C. E., Posadas, B., and Knight, P. Hortscience 45(8 Suppl). 2011.

Increasing Nursery and Greenhouse Worker Safety

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Hortscience 45(8) (SUPPLEMENT)-2010 ASHS ANNUAL CONFERENCE-AUGUST 2-5,2010

The activities performed by workers in nursery and greenhouse environments are repetitive, tedious and demanding in terms of conditions and tasks performed. The protection of worker safety will help ensure an available motivated workforce. In many cases, the integration of mechanization has helped increase the safety of some nursery operations; provided the equipment is properly used. Some nursery tasks remain primarily manual due to the nature of the work and the limited availability of equipment to offset manual effort. The activities described in this paper target worker safety improvement for operations involving various pieces of common nursery equipment and mechanization as well as those operations that remain primarily manual. Most options for nursery and greenhouse worker training are limited to either on-the-job training performed by pairing a new employee with a seasoned veteran or general "non-industry-targeted" training. A need was identified for green industry specific training in areas which included Ergonomics, Environment and Equipment. This need was recognized during the completion of a nursery systems engineering analysis of large and small container production nurseries across the Gulf South. This systems analysis utilized a top down approach that viewed the nursery system as a whole; which allowed for the identification of each unique nursery process including detailed process requirements and system inter-relationships. Knowledge of detailed process requirements allowed for safety evaluations to be completed which led to the creation of specific nursery training modules. Research shows that a focus on safety improvements will offer an additional benefit to the overall efficiency of a system. Efforts made to improve the level of safety for a particular nursery operation will increase the worker productivity as well. In addition to addressing safety concerns identified during the systems analysis, efforts were made to help ensure gains in productivity will be realized as these training modules are used. The goal of this study was to create a set of nursery worker training modules targeted at green industry workers. The DVD format was selected as the primary method of delivery offered in English and Spanish. Discussions with nursery and greenhouse owners indicated that these modules would be used to support both new worker orientation and periodic safety refresher meetings with all nursery and greenhouse workers. On-line versions of the training sessions are also offered.