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BALI place emphasis on Health and Safety at Landscape Gardening Final in Malvern



The 2010 WorldSkills UK Landscape Gardening Competition final was held at the Malvern Show in September and, in addition to the obvious focus by the judges on quality workmanship by the competitors, their adherence to good health and safety practices was essential.

The reason for the importance of quality may be apparent, with the need to do a good job in order to get paid or to gain customer referrals. The need for effective health and safety may be less obvious; although even just a few minutes observing the competitors highlighted exactly why this is so important. Although many recognise that there is a legal and a moral duty to safeguard the health, safety and wellbeing of staff (and others affected by the work) there is often still a perception that health and safety gets in the way of getting the job done. That's why it was very reassuring to see so much emphasis being placed on this important aspect as part of the competition process.

During the competition each team was given the same brief. The competitors worked in teams with people they'd never met before. For anyone now thinking that following a garden design doesn't sound so dangerous, it may be surprising to know that several hazards were noted during a few minutes of casual observation. It appears that the competition requires all materials be neatly stockpiled for each team, thereby saving them the normal hazards associated with the off-loading of vehicles (deliveries still account for approximately 70 fatalities and 2000 serious incidents each year according to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE)). Although spared from that, competitors still faced other hazards from:

Transporting materials – get this wrong and competitors could have sustained muscular skeletal disorders. It was therefore encouraging to see that everyone manoeuvring materials made use of the wheelbarrow as a means of transferring materials from one area to another.

Hazardous Substances – the need to mix cement meant that, in addition to manual handling, competitors had to consider the potential harm arising from the inhalation of dusts (arising when adding the dry cement to the mixer) and contact with skin. Appropriate controls were seen to have been adopted in the form of dust masks and gloves, which also helped to protect against the sharp edges of slabs etc.

Noise – plant and equipment used during the construction process can be noisy, which may contribute to hearing loss. Some competitors were observed to be making use of the ear defenders provided.

Heavy loads – despite the other control measures employed, there remained a potential for slabs or stones to be dropped, with the potential of crushing toes. Competitors wore protective boots to reduce the potential for harm.

Slips, trips and falls – the nature of site work means that there can often be trailing cables, especially when working alongside other tradesmen. Even during the competition trailing cables were seen to exist across the site.

Such hazards are nothing new to the landscaping industry. However, businesses are increasingly facing the pressure to demonstrate not just legal compliance but also to demonstrate adherence to health and safety best practice and qualification to schemes such as CHAS, Achilles and Constructionline. One way to be sure of having a system robust enough to satisfy these demands is to implement and maintain a formal health and safety management system which is assessed to the requirements of BS OHSAS18001:2007. For companies with an existing ISO9001 and/or ISO14001 management system, this will easily integrate with those standards and can be verified by independent United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) accredited Certification Bodies, thereby giving confidence to everyone that a company takes health and safety seriously.

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