

CREW Chief

SUCCESS GUIDE



**SO YOU MADE
CREW CHIEF?
NOW WHAT?**

**SECRETS TO A
PRODUCTIVE
CREW**

A Supplement to
PRO
Business Success For Professionals

Sponsored by:

STIHL®

Knowledge Yields Success



Dear Crew Supervisor,

Welcome to this first issue of the *Crew Chief Success Guide*. STIHL and the editors of *PRO* magazine have put this together to help you in your vital role as the leader of your team. Whether you are new to your position, or already experienced in management, continuing to learn and keeping abreast of new trends and techniques in the industry remains critical to your long-term success. Each issue will focus on different aspects of your work, with the goal of passing on tips and suggestions from experts and your peers alike, while answering some of the most common questions that get sent to the editors of *PRO*.

In this issue are suggestions on where to receive training and how to pass this along to your crew. As the slogan says, "Knowledge is power." There's no better way to establish your authority than by demonstrating that you know what you're doing. It is equally important for you to teach your crew as it is to continue your own education to ensure your company's success. Because it can be a challenge to take your entire team to a trade show or elsewhere for off-site training, you should seek out ways of bringing training in-house, whether online, through DVDs and videos or bringing in training specialists. Also, make sure you fully utilize the expertise and resources offered through your local servicing dealer.

As you move forward in your career, I encourage you to take advantage of all the training tools available to you from a wide range of sources, including trade publications such as *Crew Chief Success Guide*, trade organizations, and manufacturer resources such as www.stihlusa.com and the STIHL field applications training team.

Wishing you continued success,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Keeler". The signature is stylized and written in a cursive-like font.

John Keeler
National Training Manager
STIHL Inc.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Crew Chief Advisor **4**

- You must hold employees accountable
- Survey shows some bosses getting it right
- Handy tips for hand safety

So you made crew chief? Now what? **5**

A few key steps early on can help ensure your success

- A productive crew is key to your success
- Be a more effective communicator



Preventive maintenance prolongs equipment life **8**

Easy ways to make the investment last — and help you look good

Five crucial first steps **9**

Be fair and consistent at all times to earn respect

Keeping your tools of the trade **10**

OPEI and Stihl take charge of leaf blower issues

Throughout the Crew Chief Success Guide, the terms foreman, crew chief and supervisor are used interchangeably.

Are you ready to be the boss?

As you might expect, the true test of your mettle as a crew chief will come during a period of stress. "I could follow you around for a year, but the real management happens under stress. I could find out more about you as a manager under those conditions than I could the rest of the year," consultant and trainer Kevin Kehoe says.

And stress will come soon enough, he adds. "There will be a non-performing guy on that crew or there will be some other situation that occurs on that crew, probably in short order," he says, adding that the way you handle that first one will make all the difference, setting the tone for whether or not the crew will respect you.

If you handle the challenge fairly and address it – rather than ignore it – your chances for success will be much greater, Kevin says. This is especially true of non-performance problems, meaning crew members who are not living up to expectations, he adds.

If you're not sure how to address it, get some help. "Talk to your HR person (if your company has one), a project manager or your owner. Don't screw up the first issue that comes along because that usually sets the tone for how the guys on the crew will perceive you from then on," says Kevin.

Decisiveness and fairness are the actions of the day. Sometimes guys won't perform because they thought they should be foremen or they don't think you're good enough yet to be the foreman or you're younger than they are. Kevin says they're testing you, and the way to pass that test is to not let your emotions get the best of you and deal with it, even if you're young, in the most mature fashion you can.

Talk to the project manager, HR person or your owner and discuss the situation. Get some advice on how best to deal with it. Then go home that night, take a deep breath and go back the next day and deal with it, Kevin advises.

There is a "ring of fire" that all new supervisors must go through, Kevin says. "In the beginning, get to know everybody and set some expectations. But don't come in and be a dictator. Then deal with your first test well. Once you pass through that little ring of fire, things will surely get better for you."

Good luck with your ring of fire. We hope this guide helps, because we're pulling for you. ■

EXPERT: YOU MUST HOLD EMPLOYEES ACCOUNTABLE

According to the 2006 Crucial Conversations Workplace Survey, 69% of respondents who avoid confronting coworkers are avoiding issues of accountability, and half say the reason for shying away from these discussions about behavior, expectations or performance is that they are afraid of a negative outcome — like making an enemy, enduring a miserable argument or getting fired.

What's more, 93% said not having these sticky yet crucial discussions has negatively affected the quality of their work life. Rather than hold their coworkers accountable, most people resort to a host of unproductive tactics such as working around or avoiding the person, talking behind the person's back, or acting out their frustrations in other ways.

Joseph Grenny, co-author of the *New York Times* best-seller "Crucial Conversations," says learning skills for holding these discussions is the quickest way to boost your career.

Grenny provides four tips for successfully holding anyone accountable:

1. Master the "Hazardous Half Minute." Most accountability conversations fail in the first 30 seconds. Survive the "Hazardous Half Minute" by creating safety — when you

help people feel psychologically safe with you, they drop their defenses and listen. When you don't, they resist your influence and either blow up or clam up.

2. Stick to the Facts. When someone lets you down, you usually come up with your own explanation as to why he or she failed, such as selfishness, laziness or incompetence. Avoid false conclusions by starting your crucial conversation with the facts — not judgments or accusations. Describe the gap between your expectations and what you observed.

3. Take Charge of Emotions. When someone lets you down, avoid the tendency to feel disappointed and upset. We tend to escalate our emotions by exaggerating our conclusions and judgments. Try to give the person the benefit of the doubt while you prepare to talk with him or her in a way that helps you draw accurate conclusions.

4. Pick the Issue You Really Care About. Most problems come in large bundles. A single infraction may include anything from a procedural violation to insubordination. Address the most important issue — not the easiest — and resolve the problem that really matters. ■

HANDY TIPS FOR HAND SAFETY

Ignorance isn't bliss. When OSHA revised its Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) standard in 1994, it included a new rule on hand safety (29 CFR 1910.138).

Some tips: **Choose the right gloves for the job.** But not just any kind of glove will do. For example, use rubber rather than cotton gloves for handling hazardous liquids because rubber repels liquids, while cotton absorbs them. And for hand injuries that generally are not prevented by gloves (lacerations, broken bones, amputations), remember to include training on safe ways to use tools. ■

From: Safetyblr.com

SURVEY SHOWS THAT SOME BOSSES ARE GETTING IT RIGHT

What do a majority of workers want from their leadership? A survey of 9,351 full- and part-time workers online by NetReflector reveals that more than half (58%) of American workers are confident in their company's leadership. Two-thirds of workers would likely recommend their company to a friend.

"An employee's likelihood to recommend their company is a key measure of the quality of the relationship the employee has with his/her employer," comments Bob Hayes, Ph.D., expert in customer satisfaction measurement and author of the book "Measuring Customer Satisfaction: Survey Design, Use, and Statistical Analysis Methods."

NetReflector's poll revealed that 66% of all U.S. workers surveyed believe that their boss cares about them as a person. On the reverse, almost 60% of workers believe their boss does not set goals that would help them achieve promotion.

"Today's 'boss' is often both a coach and a member of the work team," adds Hayes.

When asked what a boss could do more of, U.S. workers' top pick (43%) was "use my skills and abilities better." This was followed by a quarter asking for "their ideas to be listened to more readily." Less than 10% felt that bosses put too much pressure on them. ■

So you made crew chief? Now what?

TAKING A FEW KEY STEPS EARLY ON CAN HELP ENSURE YOUR SUCCESS AS A NEW SUPERVISOR.

Now that you've been promoted to supervisor of your own crew, you may be wondering what to do first. Well, aside from getting your crews to the job site and getting on with the task at hand, there are a few things you can do that will take you a long way.

"The first thing you have to realize when you become foreman is that it's a different job. It may sound trite, but it's the first thing you have to get a handle on and understand, or you're going to have problems," says Monroe Porter, a consultant and president of PROOF Management.

A BRAVE NEW WORLD

One example Monroe cites of how your world will change is how you allocate your time. He says a study conducted a couple of years ago found that when a worker is a technician, he spends about 85% of his time using technical skills and about 15% communicating. Once you become a supervisor, that inverts and you actually spend 85% of your time communicating and 15% of your time using technical skills.

"At that point, what you've learned becomes more like a library or reference point than something you actually use

every day. Your role goes from being the star worker to making star workers. That's really a totally different kind of deal and people really need to get their head around the fact that it is different," Monroe says.

YOU'RE ALSO A COACH

Monroe says the next thing to keep in mind is that, now that you're a foreman, you're responsible for training and developing people. "Often, the foreman will tell his boss or the owner, 'You sent me this idiot or this bad employee that I can't work with.' But the reality is that the boss sent the best guy he could find. Most of the good people are working somewhere else, so they have to hire someone who will show up and work every day. Then the foreman has to train him on what he needs to know," Monroe says.

He adds that you can say it's not fair to you and that the company should do it, but you're now in charge of the job. If you

work with an untrained employee, you're the one who's going to go home at night with a headache. "In other words, if he can't help himself out of the problem, it's only going to get worse and could last forever. That's sometimes hard to get people to understand. There's a tendency to blame the boss," says Monroe.

In agreement is Dickran Babigian, a principal and consultant with Navix, Inc. He says that good foremen think of themselves as coaches. You have to be a good coach who's able to do the work. Furthermore, you must be able to manage multiple facets of the job.

"You also need the ability to foresee problems and not just the work that's sitting directly in front of you at that particular moment," Dickran says. He adds that he often sees supervisors who are good at guiding a crew when the members are near. But once they get spread across the yard or project, the supervisor gets absorbed into what he's doing and

doesn't notice the four or five people who aren't producing at a level they should. And that's because they're not being directed and coached in the right fashion.

Some of that, Dickran says, comes from whether that foreman has the right information to coach the guys in terms of where the project is going or if



A PRODUCTIVE CREW IS THE SECRET TO YOUR SUCCESS

Consultant and PRO Magazine columnist Monroe Porter believes that, as foreman, it's vital that you understand the basics of productivity. Remember, it's not all about speed.

"If you cut a yard and run really fast with the lawnmower, you might do a bad job. But if you can organize the yard differently so that you're more efficient with your cuts, or you cut down your drive time from yard to yard, that's going to make you more productive than trying to mow the yard faster. If you try to plant a tree faster, there's a good chance the tree is going to die. What you want to do is handle the tree more efficiently. Handle it so it doesn't have to be carried as far, or store it closer to where it's going to be planted. Those are the things that build productivity, not how hard you work," Monroe says. He adds that many of us had depression-era parents so we have this mind-set that if we work harder, we'll be more productive. "The truth is, it's all about working smarter. Now that you're a supervisor, you've got to get everyone in your crew to work smarter, not just you," according to Monroe.

The six secrets to high productivity

Here are the ingredients Monroe says are key to doing that:

No. 1 – Planning and pre-job set-up. That doesn't have to be an elaborate written plan; it might just be that while everyone else is unloading the truck in the morning, you – in your head – are laying out who is going to do what. You have to coordinate and lay things out to make sure you're doing the smartest thing with the other people. It's not just about you running in there and starting to work.

No. 2 – Evaluating the work area. Is it ready for you? Where should you start? What are the safety pitfalls like power lines or steep grades?

No. 3 – How are you going to handle the material? This is more important to productivity than how fast you dig, particularly in an install job. Let's say you're going to put pavers in. How you handle the sand and pavers, how you get them off the truck and to the work site, how you handle the excess dirt — those decisions are going to drive productivity way more than how fast you work. When you become foreman, you're in charge of figuring all that stuff out, while you used to be in charge of just doing it.

No. 4 – Manpower. Who can do what? You must get an idea of who you want to assign to which tasks. Then, training for the various tasks happens next.

No. 5 – Do you have the equipment you need? Is it maintained and taken care of?

No. 6 – Answers. Is the job laid out appropriately? Do you have questions about the layout? Are there things you need to find out before you proceed?

If a foreman can work on the front end of the job figuring these things out, the better the job is going to go. Having a plan, holding a little pre-job meeting and thinking through the process is one of the first things you should do. ■

the foreman has the ability to see forward and anticipate some of the problems that might crop up down the road, particularly if they're doing front-line work themselves.

MANAGE TIME WELL

Why is it important to anticipate problems? According to Dickran, it's important because managing within the allotted time for a job is crucial to the financial health of the company. To do that, you need the right information to guide your team.

"We often don't give the guys the numbers to hit," Dickran points out. "They're not given the right direction, and, in turn, don't give the right direction to the crew members beneath them. It's important to have a project manager who's able to bring those hours in, foresee the job and calculate, as the work proceeds, how much time is left, and what the production rate means in order to get that job done at or under budget."

You also need a clear understanding of your paperwork responsibilities. First of all, make sure someone explains how it all works. "You can't let your pride or poor spelling or other things get in the way of that. You're going to have certain minimum requirements you have to meet on paperwork, and you'll need someone in the office or elsewhere in the company to explain those requirements and how the system works," Monroe says.

Dickran adds that if he were looking to promote an employee into a foreman position, he would have to understand the company's paperwork at a basic level. "He needs to pass in paperwork daily, he needs to be able to fill in the time sheets correctly and completely so the office can process them, and note materials and subs and any special additions while they're on the job," he says.

Monroe says one of the challenges foremen have is not having an office to do paperwork. "You need to get something to keep paperwork inside the truck. It could be a portable file box from the office supply store, or a clipboard that you keep payroll

or time cards on. You need to have some way to organize the basic items you'll need including phone numbers, safety forms, time cards, work orders and change orders. If you don't have a place to put it – along with a pencil and pad – it's all going to be lost in the truck in a mess."

All the experts agree that earning respect for crew members is important because it dovetails with two other actions necessary for success: delegation and feedback. Consultant Kevin Kehoe recommends taking some time to get the

feel for the lay of the land.

"Earning respect is usually an evolution that's built over time, but from day one, you don't want to be a jerk. Don't come in and say 'I'm the boss and here's the new regime.' Spend some time watching, observing and learning about the crew, the people and the jobs, especially if this is a new crew to you and a new set of jobs," Kevin says.

He adds that shortly after you and the crew get to know each other, sit down and discuss what the basic standards and expectations are. "That doesn't have

to be a long speech, but you need to cover a few basic things. Those include attendance, safety, equipment use and expectations about behavior on the job. Behavior includes appropriate language, breaks and everything that goes along with those. You have to spend some time laying all that out," Kevin says.

As pointed out earlier, once you become a supervisor, 85% of your time is spent communicating. And good communication is the key to getting the most out of your people, which is now your top priority. ■

BE A MORE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATOR

Are you effective when communicating with your crew? When you provide instructions, do your crew members generally follow them well? If you believe you can do better, here are some tools that can help.

Do you have a problem employee? The best way to correct bad behavior, according to consultant Monroe Porter, is for foremen to be future-focused. Avoid talking about the problem. Rather, talk about the solution. You do this by avoiding "why" questions. When dealing with workers, focus on "what and how" questions, Monroe advises.

"A why question drives you into the problem, instead of driving you into the solution," Monroe explains. For example, if you ask an employee why he was late, he'll say things like, 'I didn't know what time we started,' or 'I got stuck in traffic,' or 'The baby kept me up all night.' The employee makes a list of excuses. Instead, you want to say something like, 'We need you here on time. What can we do to avoid this in the future?' The bottom line is that you want to become proactive on moving forward, not complain about what went wrong.

Trainer and consultant Kevin Kehoe advises that people communicate differently. He says there are four basic communication styles:

Dominant. Their communication style is sort of pointing and grunting. Dominant people are very low-verbal by nature, but they do get work done. They respond to action.

Influential. Very verbal people, but almost too flexible. More talk than action at times. They respond to a verbal style.

Steady. They are more passive-aggressive. They don't like a lot of change, prefer to see steadiness and don't respond to dominant people very well. They respond to predictability.

Compliant. Very fact-based, detail-oriented kind of people. They respond to rules, facts and data.

Kevin says it's important for a foreman to develop a direct line

of communication with his crew members and supervisor.

"Just understanding communication styles goes a long way," Kevin says. "People then understand how to best adjust when communicating with somebody. I would not communicate as a dominant person with a steady-style person in the same way. I'd talk dominant to dominant. Otherwise the message just wouldn't get across. I would intimidate them and it would sound condescending."

Kevin says there is no one silver bullet, but it's essential to understand your style and understand your boss' style. Then, work at getting those two together.

He adds that good communication is based on two things: common ground and a common goal. Common ground is, 'I know who you are, I know your style, I know you have a family, I know you like to play soccer.'

"After that, common goal gives us a way to adjust communication so that it's not always emotional; it's more on a business plane," Kevin says. "We all have a common goal, which is that we have to control hours, stay on schedule, produce quality, etc."

Communication that's based on common ground and common goals helps you converse on a business level.

Consultant Dickran Babigian advises that speaking in specific terms is most effective. "I tell people not to talk about things that are vague, or use words that are vague, such as, 'You did a good job,' or 'You did well,'" Dickran relates. "I try to be more specific by saying, 'Hey great job on this. We budgeted 100 hours and you came in at 95,' or, 'The customer is really happy,' 'It came out better than planned,' or 'You saved 6% on the hours,' 'You saved 6% on the materials.' Be specific as to why you're happy about the work. The word *good* doesn't particularly convey what the crew member did well."

Dickran adds that if the owner doesn't talk that way, can he expect the foremen to? It has to be part of your culture. ■

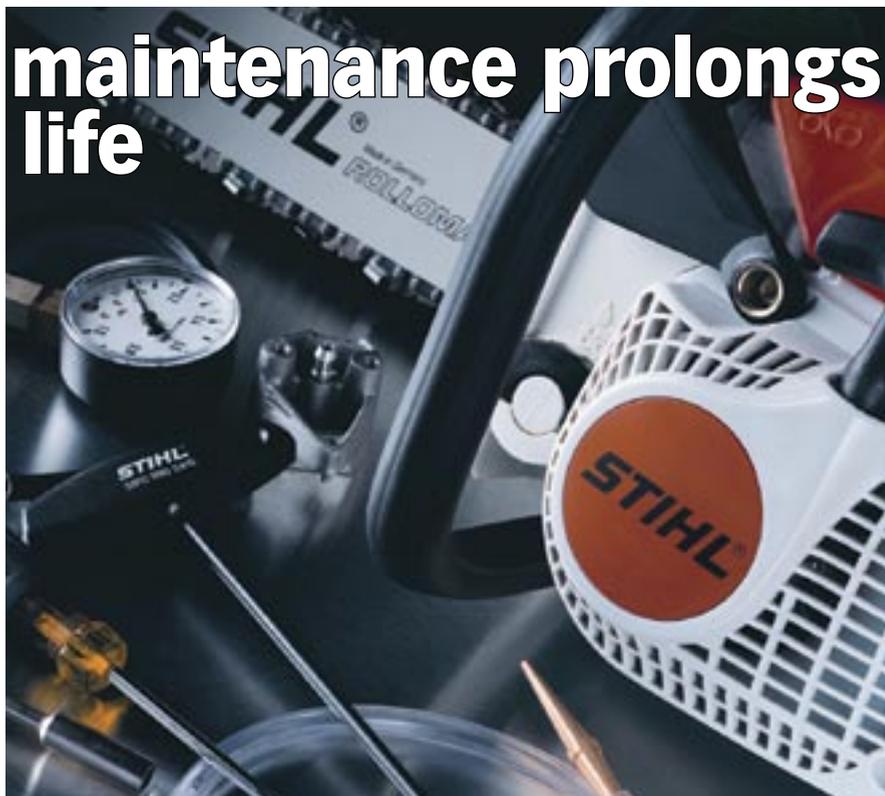
Preventive maintenance prolongs equipment life

EASY WAYS TO MAKE THE INVESTMENT LAST – AND HELP YOU LOOK GOOD.

Have you ever experienced costly job delays because your equipment is down? Performing scheduled maintenance can help reduce your downtime by preventing wear-and-tear on essential parts.

For Tony Ramirez, fleet shop manager for Gibbs Landscaping in Atlanta, maintaining equipment is key to the company's success. "Ongoing maintenance saves money, minimizes downtime, and keeps our clients happy because our work is done on time," Tony says. "We've eliminated overtime and service costs associated with equipment being repaired because proper maintenance schedules weren't followed."

Tony's shop adheres to a rigorous maintenance schedule, servicing equipment every 10 working days, which has significantly extended the life of his equipment.



"Consequently, we've had some backpack blowers last for five years; nearly double the average life we were getting from them," Tony adds. Other landscaping contractors can benefit from a similar approach.

"Professional users should pay special attention to four key maintenance areas: air filtration, fuel filtration, spark plugs, and the sharpness of cutting edges on trimmers, edgers, and chain saws,

etc.," recommends Randy Scully, product service manager for Stihl Inc.

Why are these four maintenance areas so important?

- Cleaning and/or replacing air filters protects the engine from abrasive materials that enter the engine and can cause wear and costly repairs.
- Fuel filters, hoses and lines should be replaced annually to ensure peak performance and proper fuel flow to the engine.
- Spark plugs directly affect engine efficiency and should be inspected and replaced to ensure optimum starting performance.
- Sharpness of cutting tools and chains should be monitored because dull edges cause internal friction and wear on the clutch, as well as reduce engine and cutting efficiency.

For help expanding the life of your equipment, contact your local servicing dealer. ■

Tech Tips from the Field

Q: Will ethanol (E10) gasoline hurt my outdoor power equipment?

A: If the proper precautions are taken, gasoline containing a 10% quantity of ethanol should not generally cause a problem in most outdoor power equipment products. Be sure to read and follow the instructions in the operator's manuals for your specific products. In general, you should take the following precautions: 1) ensure the carburetor is adjusted properly for the fuel being used, 2) use a good-quality two-cycle oil in the fuel/oil mix, 3) keep your fuel fresh, 4) shake your gas can well, 5) empty fuel from equipment that will be idle for 60 days or longer, and 6) keep a fresh mixture and avoid getting water in the gasoline.

— By Dan Hull, applications manager, Pacific Stihl

Five crucial first steps to your success as a new crew leader

Kevin Kehoe is a consultant who has worked in the landscape industry for more than a decade. He says one of the most difficult, but important, things for new supervisors to realize is that you can't manage by being friends to everybody.

"That's a big problem with a lot of supervisors when they first get the job," Kevin says. "They approach it as, 'These are my friends, these are my buddies, they know me. If I stay friends with them, things will work out great and they'll respect me.'"

FIVE KEYS TO SUCCESS

The fact of the matter is that it doesn't usually happen that way. Kevin says he's observed many landscape companies over the years and there are five things for new supervisors to do to help make themselves successful:

- 1) Really get to know your people.** Who are they? Do they have family, wives, husbands or children? Get to know who they are and understand them as people. You have to invest some time. Know their name and just talk with them.
- 2) You have to do this gently, but you have to set expectations or standards** around some very basic principles like showing up on time, wearing proper gear, and not using inappropriate language in the truck or on the job site.
- 3) Hierarchy.** Good managers understand hierarchy, which means that, on a four-person crew, they should establish



who is the lead, who is second and who is third. This clearly sets a bar for crew members to understand that there is a hierarchy.

4) Managing the bell curve. There are A, B and C players, and you have to realize that you don't have all A's. You might have one great guy and the rest might be B's. You won't get as much out of them as you might your A guy. That being said, you really need to get rid of

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respect.

your C's. You also have to be very careful not to burn out your A guy and not rely on him to do everything.

5) You have to be fair and consistent all the time. That's something you establish over time. It's really based on No. 2: setting expectations for behavior

and performance. The bottom line is that you have to earn respect before you can actually get results.

A BIG PSYCHOLOGICAL CHANGE FOR FOREMEN

"That's what we look at when we talk about new foremen and what they can do because it's a big psychological change for them," Kevin adds.

When managing the curve – A-, B- and C-type people – all the motivation techniques that managers use typically don't work on A's and C's because C's don't respond and A's don't need it. It's really the B's that require most of the attention.

The key for foremen is to not always give the A people the hardest tasks. Delegate enough to the B and C employees so that you can bring them up and train them. Still, let the A person know he's an A employee. Let him know you'll lean on him more than the others from time to time, and that you'll also make sure to take care of him. ■

Keeping your tools of the trade

OPEI AND STIHL TAKE CHARGE OF LEAF BLOWER ISSUES.

It's no secret that some state and municipal regulators have attempted to ban leaf blowers. This is particularly evident in residential communities throughout California, as well as some communities in Arizona and Hawaii. In 1999 the California Air Resources Board (CARB) considered enforcing a statewide ban on leaf blowers that would have greatly affected landscapers' businesses. Fortunately, CARB did not find evidence to support enacting such a drastic measure, though some communities, such as Palo Alto, have enacted a ban that continues to generate controversy.

Today, a wave of anti-leaf blower sentiment has subsequently spread across the country. However, outdoor power equipment (OPE) manufacturers are

Landscapers need to be aware of leaf blower issues and know where to turn.

working with trade and professional organizations in taking proactive steps to support green-industry professionals by helping to alleviate leaf blower resistance.

BLOWERS HAVE FACED CHALLENGES

Since the leaf blower was first introduced in the 1970s, the most common complaint has been the noise that is created, followed by air pollution from emissions and particulate matter. Blower manufacturers have developed

new technologies to address the emissions requirements of CARB and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), making leaf blowers today that are 70% cleaner than 1990 models. In addition to satisfying air pollution concerns, manufacturers have also reduced blower noise by as much as 75%. The OPE industry, led by the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute's (OPEI) initiatives, has effectively convinced many municipalities and the general public that bans are not necessary.

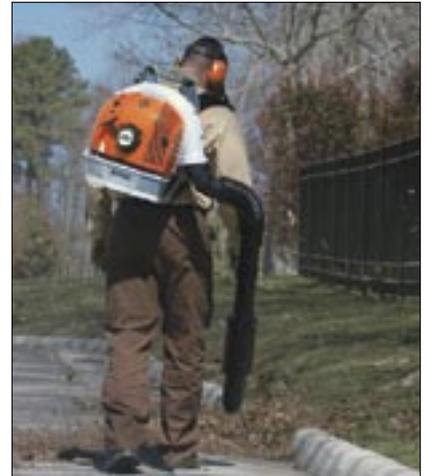
ON THE FRONT LINES OF THE BATTLE

By communicating with the regulators directly, OPE industry spokespersons have been able to present the facts regarding leaf blowers, their importance to landscapers who rely on them for their livelihood, and how they can be used properly and courteously. As a result, compromises, such as hours restrictions, have been made in many instances, culminating in new regulations that still permit use of leaf blowers.

In 2002 OPEI and leading OPE manufacturers formed a leaf blower task force, led by chairman Scott Tilley of Stihl Inc. The task force has introduced a campaign with a three-part goal in mind:

- 1) Proactively educate the public, operators, and municipalities (regulators) on the value of leaf blowers
- 2) Inform how leaf blowers can be used courteously and efficiently
- 3) Dispel any outdated information and misconceptions regarding leaf blowers.

"Landscapers need to be aware of leaf blower issues and know where to turn for information," says Tilley. "The task force has created a variety of helpful



tools and resources to assist landscapers on the proper use of leaf blowers in light of current regulations and ordinances."

These informative resources for landscapers include:

- Educational **video on the "Proper Operation of Leaf Blowers"** is available through www.stihlusa.com in the "Information" section
- **CD presentation that includes a factual review of the leaf blower**, including its history, applications, leaf blower concerns, misconceptions, facts and solutions (can view at www.opei.org, "Consumer Product Info")
- **Training manual on the "Safe & Courteous Use" of leaf blowers** (available for download via PDF on Stihl's website under the "Information" page at www.stihlusa.com or at OPEI's website)
- For additional information on OPEI resources, including the task force, contact OPEI at 703-549-7600 or pgoodell@opei.org.

The task force can also recommend speakers for meetings or hearings with local municipalities, or equip you with the communication tools and information you need if regulations are being considered in your area. ■



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