



## BC Nursery Manager Makes Safety Easy

By Alana Fearnall for the Canadian Agricultural Safety Association

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Safe work practices need to be proactive and easy to implement according to one nursery site manager in British Columbia.

Larry Daoust is the manager of the SilvaGro Partnership Juniper Beach Nursery in Walhachin, BC where millions of tree seedlings are grown for reforestation purposes every year. During peak season, the nursery requires as many as 60 workers on site. Daoust is responsible for the safety of them all. As with all farm work, Daoust explains it's necessary to be mindful of all potential hazards at the Juniper Beach location, no matter how minor they may seem. That's why safe work practices are reviewed with each and every employee and subcontractor, daily.

Each new farm worker receives mandatory orientation their first morning on the job. A large, four by eight foot bulletin board serves as a visual guide, which allows supervisors to orient large groups of new workers at one time and also takes the place of safety manuals which Daoust believes are too prone to gathering dust.

"We all have manuals, but manuals tend to stay in the cupboard," he says. "I like to have a very practical safety program, more hands on... with a visual as well."

At Juniper Beach, once all new workers are introduced to the orientation board, they're expected to make regular use of it. Daoust says often, he will draw attention to the board during coffee or lunch breaks to point out any unsafe behaviour he has witnessed and how it should be corrected. Because it highlights all sorts of useful information such as the greatest hazards associated with specific tasks and the precautions to prevent injuries, workers learn to use it without prompting, to refresh their own memories.

Tailgate meetings for all workers take place later in the day, to ensure bad habits don't develop over time. "Tailgate meetings are not fancy or formal," Daoust insists. The routine is a planned opportunity for management to exchange feedback with the employees and subcontractors on site that day. Everyone participates in activity specific stretching and that's when Daoust has a chance to give employees feedback like, "I noticed you weren't bending using your knees to lift, so just remember, when you're doing this job, it's very important to bend your knees." Very often, this is also when employees provide feedback of their own, pointing out hazards that management needs to address.

"The more we interact with people, the more they give feedback, and the more information they are willing to provide us for making this a safer workplace," Daoust explains.

As site manager, all of his behaviour is intended to support all workers, supervisors to the newest worker. The nursery relies heavily on outside labour, many of whom are originally from Punjab, a state in northern India, now living locally. Sometimes that causes a language barrier that must be overcome during safety training, so Daoust says it's common to see a translator around the nursery. It's important to him that everyone is treated the same at work and that inclusion earns him some affection from subcontractors.

"Everybody has to be engaged in what we do," he explains. "I want a working relationship with everybody; I work with my people as a cooperative unit to solve problems, I have a wonderful staff, I want their knowledge and brainpower to manage this site better."

He explains that everyone is prone to develop vices. So he insists on good work habits to keep poor practices at bay. A good example is the company's policy on stretching.





Daoust says it's a shame these practices aren't promoted by every nursery manager and farm business owner. Having worked in Saskatchewan, Ontario, and now in British Columbia, he's seen how physical labour can take a toll on the body and that putting emphasis on prevention can help. Though many people might find it hard to believe, says he's depended on compliance officers from labour departments in all the provinces he's worked in for some of the best help in promoting safety. He's even been known to invite them on a tour of his facilities each time he's moved.

Daoust cites AgSafe in British Columbia as a prime example of a great working relationship. "AgSafe and their Superintendent of Field Operations, Reg Steward, have been a major contributor to our success," he says.

"It's easier to get up to speed if you invite them on site and you're a willing partner, than having them show up and say okay, you're deficient here, here, and here," he says. "I wear multiple hats and, just like everybody else, safety is only one of them. We aren't perfect; we try to do the best we can, with the people we have."

**Photo Tags:**

- Daoust 1 - The Orientation Board at SilvaGro Partnership Juniper Beach Nursery, Walhachin, BC
- Daoust 2 - Aerial Photo of SilvaGro Partnership Juniper Beach Nursery, Walhachin, BC
- Daoust 3 - Aerial Photo of SilvaGro Partnership Juniper Beach Nursery, Walhachin, BC
- Daoust 4 - Tasha Harder, Irrigation Specialist & Health & Safety Organizer and Larry Daoust, Site Manager, SilvaGro Partnership Juniper Beach Nursery, Walhachin, BC
- Daoust 5 - Larry Daoust, Site Manager, SilvaGro Partnership Juniper Beach Nursery, Walhachin, BC

