



Recommended Best Practices for Tree Care Companies during the COVID-19 Pandemic

As tree care businesses across the United States and world grapple with the new normal of the COVID-19 pandemic and move to re-open, TCIA has compiled a guide of industry resources and “best practices”. COVID-19 will be with us for a long time, so ensuring our members are implementing the industry’s best practices is critical now, more than ever.

The best practices outlined below cover specific actions employers can take to reduce the risk of COVID-19 spread, as well as broad ways employers may choose to look at this situation and relate to employees.

These best practices should not end when the employee goes home for the day. Employers cannot dictate how their employees behave while “off the clock”, but they can educate and encourage them to prioritize the health of themselves, their coworkers, their friends and loved ones and their communities. TCIA encourages our members to continue prioritizing health and safety while the COVID-19 pandemic runs its course.

For more industry-specific information, Alexander Martin’s “Recommended Best Management Practice for the Arboriculture Industry During the COVID-19 Pandemic” served as a resource for this document, and includes other recommendations specific to tree care operations in addition to those mentioned in this guide. The complete report can be found [here](#).

Routine Precautions and General Guidelines

The following precautions are adapted from the Occupational Health and Safety Administration (OSHA) [Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19](#), Best practices located on the [Center for Disease Control & Prevention \(CDC\) website](#), and [TCIA’s COVID-19 Guidance website](#).

- Maintain clean and hygienic workplaces.
 - o Disinfectants should be readily available to clean any surfaces that are touched regularly, including, but not limited to vehicle interiors, door handles, power tools, and operating controls. Disinfecting should occur at least twice daily, including, but not limited to the end of each workday.
 - o [A list of EPA approved products for use against the COVID-19 virus can be found here.](#)
- Promote regular and thorough handwashing by any individuals involved with your business.
 - o In the absence of handwashing facilities, alcohol-based hand sanitizer (at least 60% alcohol by volume) should be readily available for all employees and visitors.

- [Signs reminding employees of handwashing and other cleaning techniques should be posted wherever appropriate.](#)
- Visitors to the office or jobsite should be limited to the greatest degree possible. If a visit is necessary, all visitors should comply with all the best practices outlined in this document, as well as any applicable state law.
- Encourage employees to practice proper cough etiquette and hand hygiene.
- Encourage employees to avoid touching their faces with unwashed hands.
- Encourage employees to stay home if they are not feeling well and/or display symptoms of infection (included, but not limited to new onset of cough, sneezing, fever, runny nose, or a change in taste/smell). [A list of common COVID-19 symptoms can be found here.](#)
 - Continue to communicate and promote that employees must stay home, even if experiencing only mild symptoms consistent with those of COVID-19.
 - Sick employees should follow the CDC guide "[What to do if you are sick](#)"
- Display all Department of Labor posters required by law in the workplace, keeping in mind that common areas where labor law posters are typically displayed may be off limits during the pandemic. [These posters can be found here.](#)
- Employees should NOT share personal articles, food, or water.
- Employees who are able should be directed to work from home, if possible.
- Client interaction should be minimized.
 - Whenever possible, conversation with clients should be done over a telephone call, a video call, or through email or text. Encourage the client to stay inside or away while employees are on the job site, where applicable.
 - Estimates, invoices, or other documents should all be exchanged electronically, where possible. If the client does not have these capabilities, documents should be left somewhere where interaction between clients and employees is minimized, such as in a mailbox, etc.
- Some states and municipalities require all members of the public to wear masks when outside of their home. Businesses should always comply with the laws in their jurisdiction. Where the use of a mask is not required, all employees should still wear masks when social distancing is a challenge.
 - [The CDC guidance on wearing a mask or face covering can be found here.](#)

General Measures Specific to the Arboriculture Industry

Employee Rotation and Disinfecting

- Whenever possible, prevent the rotation of employees to different crews, worksites, duties, or time slots to reduce the risk of infection and transmission of COVID-19.
 - Employers should maximize opportunities to place employees residing together in the same vehicles for transportation and in the same crews to limit exposure
- When possible, employees should arrange for employees to arrive to work in staggered shifts, in order to limit the number of people in one space at any given time.
 - Employers may also encourage employees to arrive at the jobsite directly rather than reporting to a central location, if feasible.

- Where employee rotation cannot be avoided, employees should properly disinfect all surfaces, including, but not limited to the interior of offices, door handles, vehicles, heavy machinery, and workplace gear and tools in accordance with [CDC disinfecting protocols](#).

Food and Water

- Employees should NOT share food or water with other individuals.
- Employees should arrive to work with enough food and water for the workday.
- Employees should avoid eating in fleet vehicles or other enclosed vehicle areas, whenever possible.

Employee Rest Periods (Meal Break, Rest Break)

- Employees should maintain a minimum of 6 feet (2 meters) from other individuals during rest periods/breaks.

Crew Meetings

- Safety meetings, jobsite briefings, and other crew meetings should be conducted with a minimum of 6 feet (2 meters) between employees.

Distancing

- Employers should designate **one** employee to handle jobs that involve contact with shared tools, surfaces, vehicles, etc.
 - o For example: one employee should handle locking/unlocking the office door every day, one person responsible for loading/unloading tools from the truck, one employee responsible for driving the truck to the jobsite, etc.
- Each assignment should stay with one employee every day and change in this assignment should be limited as much as possible.

Workflow

- Employers should identify “choke points” and “high-risk areas” prior to employees returning to work. These are areas where employees typically congregate, or where social distancing is more challenging.
- Employers may consider posting signs in these areas, reiterating the need to social distance in these areas, or to avoid them entirely.
- For the tree care industry, choke points may include, but are not limited to:
 - o Truck tool boxes
 - o Refueling areas
 - o Shop areas
 - o Vehicle cabs
 - o Landing zone

- Chipper infeed area
- Lunch area
- Rigging lines

Employer/Employee Recommendations

- Employers should designate a qualified workplace coordinator who will be responsible for COVID-19 assessment and control planning. All workers should know how to contact the identified coordinator with any COVID-19 concerns, and the coordinator should handle such concerns confidentially, as appropriate.
 - A control plan may be based on the prevention approach known as the CDC hierarchy of controls. More information can be found [here](#).
- Employers should recognize that COVID-19 can result in stress and anxiety among employees.
 - Employers and Employees should refer to the CDC guide: [How to Cope with Job Stress and Build Resilience During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) for more information.
- Safety needs to continue to be a priority for TCIA members, and employers should recognize that during these difficult times, employees may need more support in order to remain focused on each job at hand.
- Employers should not disclose personal medical information about employees to other individuals. For example: confidentiality is required if an employee tests positive for COVID-19.
- Employers should consider ceasing operations when an employee has tested positive for COVID-19 or the crew has come into contact with a client who has tested positive for COVID-19. State or local health department protocols may be applicable in this situation, employers should familiarize themselves with the procedures in their jurisdiction.
- Employers should reimburse the additional mileage for employees who use personal vehicles to drive to jobsites, and provide an allowance for employees to supply their own water
- Employers should encourage cashless transactions, especially electronic, remote, or online payment platforms. Face-to-face interaction with clients should be eliminated or reduced as much as possible.

Key Employer Considerations

As tree care companies operate in the world impacted by COVID-19, several key questions must be answered on a regular basis. Below are some sample questions employers should be thinking about regularly as tree care companies continue operations:

- Are our procedures up to date with our state's health department guidelines?
- Do we need to take additional precautions for a certain job? For when we operate in a certain area?
- Should certain jobs wait until the threat of COVID-19 transmission in the community is reduced? Is the job something you consider "essential"?

Considerations for Employee Temperature Checks and COVID-19 Prevention

So called “temperature checks” are becoming increasingly popular for employers as their employees return to work. This process typically involves an employer taking the temperature of all employees prior to work each day and sending the employee home if they had a fever: a symptom of COVID-19.

Employers should carefully consider the entire process of temperature checks if this is a route you choose to explore. Confidentiality is key, and employers should carefully consider if staff, a third party, or the employees themselves (through self-reporting) should oversee the process.

Proper training, PPE, a space where confidentiality can be maintained, and a proper thermometer (preferably no-touch) are some of the consideration’s employers need to take before setting up a temperature-taking program. It should also be noted that fever is an imperfect measure for determining if an employee has COVID-19, plenty of people have demonstrated the ability to transmit the disease without showing any symptoms.

As we learn more about COVID-19 and how the disease is transmitted, more information about temperature checks and other screening capabilities are sure to come out. TCIA encourages all employers to carefully consider the pros and cons of this practice, and set up controls to ensure safety, reliability, and confidentiality are all observed if you are considering the use of temperature checks.

Considerations If Employee Tests Positive for COVID-19

- Employees should self-monitor for signs and symptoms of COVID-19 if they suspect possible exposure.
- When an employee reports signs or symptoms of COVID-19, the employee should not show up to conduct in-person work and should notify their direct supervisor immediately.
- If an employee is diagnosed with COVID-19, he/she should notify the HR director (or another applicable individual) immediately.
- Employer should notify state officials if an employee tests positive for COVID-19
- Employer should notify all relevant personnel, including employees, customers, vendors, etc., with whom the diagnosed employee has come in close contact. Employer should request all personnel who have been in close contact with the employee self-quarantine for 14 days. Confidentiality of the employee who tested positive should be maintained.
- Employer should notify all employees of the fact that an employee (who shall remain anonymous) has tested positive for COVID-19. This message shall include the following:
 - o Reminder to all employees of CDC and local health department testing guidelines.
 - o Reminder to all employees of policies and procedures that have been put in place to combat the spread of COVID-19.
 - o Acknowledgement of the emotional impact this news and all COVID-19 news is having on members of employer's organization and encourage employees to contact their supervisors with any questions or concerns.

- Employer should arrange for a thorough cleaning of the areas of employer's facilities that the employee with a confirmed case inhabited. Such cleaning should follow all applicable CDC guidelines and cleaning standards.