



Multiple Injuries During Storm Cleanup Reinforce Importance of Effective and Timely Training

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Many IRMA member communities were affected by the recent severe weather and claim data shows just how badly. Not only were members hit with property damage but workers' compensation claims increased as well.

The claims submitted show the gamut of what we work to prevent in sometimes infrequent but high-hazard job tasks such as storm cleanup. Claims include:

- Eye injuries caused by lack of protective eyewear
- Back injuries related to lifting of heavy debris
- Contact with poison ivy
- Emergency road clearing of debris without proper equipment or assistance

This begs the question: Are employers setting up employees for success in these situations with effective and timely training for all employees, including seasonal and emergency responders?

Effective and Timely Training:

Very simply put, if you are not addressing injury prevention in your regular trainings, you are missing the mark. And if you are not at least reviewing these topics before crews head out to high-risk jobs like storm cleanup, you are missing an opportunity.

Training on storm cleanup activities should include use of proper PPE such as protective eyewear with side protection, face protection for brush chipper operations, long sleeves and pants for protection from poison ivy, and snugly fit gloves without straps or loose parts that could get caught in a chipper. For more information on proper eye wear, see [IRMA's February 2021 E-News article](#) on the topic. For more information on OSHA-required PPE Programs, see [IRMA's Personal Protective Equipment Model Policy](#).

Training should also include injury prevention topics such as use of lift-assist devices, team lifts, breaking down debris into smaller loads, and proper lifting techniques. See [IRMA's Injury Prevention page](#) for resources on this topic.

While you may train on these topics annually, tailgate talks and regular in-service training prior to crews heading out for the day can be a very effective way to provide refresher training when it really counts. See IRMA's website for [Online Training Resources](#) on brush chipper, summer safety, and downed power lines for police.

Behavior Observations:

Training must be reinforced in the work environment. Observe your employees regularly to ensure that PPE is worn and best practices are performed at the job site. Reinforce positive behaviors and correct negative behaviors immediately. See IRMA's website for a [Behavior Observation Program Model Policy](#).

Thorough and Timely Accident and Near Miss Reporting and Review:

To gain understanding and improved work safety should an accident happen, Supervisors and Safety Committees must thoroughly review all accidents to determine root cause and take effective correction action. Never accept a response from an employee of "this couldn't have been prevented." Dig into incidents and commit to preventing similar incidents down the road. See IRMA's website for an [Accident Investigation & Reporting Model Policy](#) and [Safety Committees and Accident Review Boards Model Policy](#). If training is what you are looking for, [contact us](#) to schedule a Core 4 Part I & II class!

Resources:

For more information on all hazards of storm cleanup including downed power lines, fall risks, and more, see OSHA's [Keeping Workers Safe During Disaster Cleanup and Recovery](#) and CDC's [Clean Up Safely After a Disaster](#).