Almost every workplace has an exposure to electricity. The Consumer Product Safety Commission reports that every year there are more than 140,000 electrical-related structure fires, which take an average of 500 lives, injure more than 5,000 people, and cause nearly $1.6 billion in property damage. There are a few electrical exposures that are unique to the pre-season start-up at ski resorts. Electrically powered snow guns that have been in storage for the past several months, extension cords that have been left outside in the summer sun, on-slope electrical outlets that have had close calls with mowers, overhead or buried power lines that may have been compromised during summer construction, cash registers that have been moved from one location to the next, and power tools that have been bouncing around on the back of a pick-up all summer are only a few examples of things that will need to be inspected before they are energized. Also, check inside your storage sheds and outbuildings with electrical power for old, cracked, frayed, or rodent-damaged electrical cords and accompanying equipment.

Equipment that’s been in storage for months will need to be energized and started again. Even though you or your staff may have significant experience with this equipment, it is important to take the time to re-familiarize yourself and others with the correct operation and safety concerns of each piece of equipment. Have a qualified person inspect all stored electrical equipment as it is brought back into use. This inspection should focus on cords, connections, and other electrical components as well. If problems are found, lock-out and tag-out this equipment so it cannot be used until repairs are complete. Remember to use extension cords only on a temporary basis, and be sure they are grounded, in good condition, and rated for their intended use.

Many resorts across the United States have already set the date for their employee orientations, and for most resorts this is the only opportunity to be in front of the majority of your employees at the same time. As company policies and procedures are communicated, it is essential that your safety commitment is reinforced as an integral part of every policy and procedure. Employee orientation is the perfect time to state that every person, regardless of experience or seniority, needs to consistently follow the same safety standards.

Following the main assembly of employee orientation, it is customary that department heads take their new and returning employees on a tour of the facilities to familiarize them with the workplace. Department supervisors need to focus on the hazards of their specific workplace, and the special safety precautions in place to protect against each of those hazards.
• High-pressure water and compressed air have their own inherent hazards. Make sure to inspect all equipment before pressurizing it. Valves that have not been turned for months need to turn freely and all couplings need to be properly rated, tight, and secure. Make sure that your crew is well trained to recognize proper equipment operation and to tag and correct any equipment that is not functioning properly. Snowmaking safety affects more ski resort employees than the snowmakers themselves. Snowmaking may be in progress during normal skiing hours, and even if snowmaking isn’t taking place on a certain trail, snowmaking lines and hydrants may be pressurized on the trail with hundreds of pounds of pressure. Fully automated snowmaking systems can result in snow guns turning off and on without notice. Remind your staff to maintain a safe distance from snowmaking equipment, even if it isn’t operating at the time. Employees should not congregate in areas immediately next to snowmaking hydrants or guns, and if you observe anyone leaning on or playing around snowmaking equipment, be proactive in educating them and directing them away from this potentially hazardous area.

• High voltage in a wet snowmaking environment creates yet another risk exposure. Ground Fault Circuit Interruption (GFCI) devices need to be checked for proper function, and electrical safety policies must be observed and followed at all times.

• Personal Protective Equipment, such as hearing and eye protection, needs to be inspected prior to use and worn properly. Please make sure that your veteran employees set a good example for the newest members of your team.

The pace around most ski resorts pick up dramatically following employee orientation. Immediately establish that department safety meetings are to be taken seriously, and that every suggestion from employees regarding safety will be given consideration.

Time can get very compressed in those few final days before you open for skiing. Resist the temptation to take shortcuts, and now more than ever, set the example that every safety policy is put in place for a reason. The tendency, at this time of year, is to try to get too much done in too little time. An important task of every department supervisor is to be realistic in their goals, so that the demands placed on the staff don’t outpace safety.

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