

An Important Profession

Arborists are specialists in the care of trees and shrubs, particularly in urban settings. Arboriculture entails planting, pruning, fertilizing, monitoring and treating trees for insects and diseases, as well as transplanting and removing trees. It also includes managing trees and green spaces owned by municipalities and electrical line clearance by commercial arboricultural companies. The skills of the professional arborist are more valuable than ever because of the increased recognition of the environmental, economic, and social benefits of trees. Thousands of tree workers respond to natural disasters, working with utility companies and other disaster response teams to clear lines, remove tree debris and help restore essential functionality of public works.

Arboriculture is a growing field, and an increasingly important one. It is a profession that can provide economic self-sufficiency (remuneration is generally higher than the hospitality or similar service industries) while also offering career advancement.

This “green collar” job offers many career choices, including a path to business ownership. A standard progression might follow a pattern such as: ground worker; climber; certified arborist, tree care specialist or plant health care technician; supervisor or safety trainer; manager, sales manager or regional supervisor; and company owner. Consultancy work and research are additional career pathways.

Problem Statement/Need for Funds: A Workforce in Need of Specialized Training

The tree care industry is ranked among the most dangerous professions in the U.S. It is also one of the top five industries that OSHA targeted in its strategic plan because of the industry’s poor safety record.

The need for training and a recognized focus on small businesses was recently reinforced by the Centers for Disease Control. Its Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report for April 24, 2009 examined fatalities associated with the tree care industry from 1992-2007. The report found that:

“A substantial proportion of fatalities occurred in workers who were self-employed or worked for establishments with fewer than 10 employees. Small businesses typically do not have the resources to employ occupational safety professionals, and might lack the knowledge, skills, and resources to identify safety hazards and develop safe work practices.”

The CDC report recommends that companies should develop a comprehensive safety training program:

“Employers, regardless of establishment size, should seek out information on worker safety before initiating tree care operations, and should develop, implement, and enforce a comprehensive safety program that includes formal training in tree safety, fall protection, electrical hazards, machine safety, safety along roadways, first aid, and cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR).”

Further, in its comment to OSHA concerning a proposed separate standard for tree trimming¹, NIOSH analyzed 45 FACE reports and found that dedicated safety personnel were employed by only four percent of employers, and only 15 percent of employers provided comprehensive training for their workers (field, classroom and on-the-job). The majority (69%) relied on informal, on-the-job training.

Specialized knowledge and training are necessary to provide owners and employees with the skill-set to work safely and efficiently, and to prepare them for advancement. Few, if any local workforce council, state employment agency, One-Stop-Employment Center or Community or Vocational School offers the specialized training that will deliver the skill set required. The Tree Care Industry Association Foundation (TCIAF)² and the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA)³ have developed safety and educational programs, standards of tree care practices, and management training for arboricultural firms throughout the United States. TCIAF and TCIA offer an extensive range of employee-oriented, correspondence-based training courses; employer-oriented guidance materials and employee/employer-oriented workshops and conferences.

For purposes of this grant request, attached to this narrative are the training programs most helpful at this time to growing my business, recruiting new hires and promoting employee career pathways to advancement.

¹ Comments of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health in Response to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking for Tree Care Operations. Docket No. OSHA-2008-0012, RIN 1218-AC40, December 15, 2008.

² TCIAF is organized exclusively for charitable and educational purposes and received its Internal Revenue Code Section 501(c) (3) status in September 2006. The purposes of TCIAF are to advance education and professional development in the green industry, improve safety and reduce accident rates in the tree care industry, and to disseminate information key to practitioners and consumers about proper tree care.

³ TCIA is a not-for-profit trade association founded in 1938, whose mission is to advance tree care companies. TCIA provides continuing education, training, conferences and publications to promote the safe and appropriate practice of tree care, including Tree Care Industry magazine, the most circulated and read publication in the industry, and TCI EXPO, the world's largest tree care trade show and education conference. Almost 8,600 tree care industry professionals have been trained at this venue during the last three years alone. Each February TCIA hosts a Winter Management Conference offering workshop sessions from some of the best minds in the business on increasing efficiency, production and profits.