

RETAIL GARDEN CENTRES

The Top 5 Health and Safety Risk
Areas & Quick Steps to Compliance





Take a large retail premises spread over indoor and outdoor environments, trailing hoses, water features, seasonal display changes, unwieldy, sharp and heavy product lines (what is the best way to carry a tree, a swing set, a fiberglass pond?) and combine with daily deliveries and moving forklift trucks - all within a unique 'family-browsing' setting. That's a lot of health and safety considerations for any garden centre manager!

This e-guide discusses 5 of the top risk areas garden centre managers must look at to ensure the health and safety of staff and customers. One of them may surprise you.

Even if *your* business is less green-fingered, the tips and deep rooted principles in this Garden Centre e-guide will help you grow a fresh perspective on your business risks and some quick steps to compliance.

1. MANUAL HANDLING: LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAN

Let's get straight to the problem with manual handling: **human nature**.

We instinctively dive in, reach out, pick up, all without forethought. Who hasn't heroically -pridefully- grappled with a load too awkward or too heavy, only to ruefully reflect upon how they should've tackled it? The problem is not not knowing what to do, it's pausing to appraise the situation and apply that knowledge beforehand. Training in Manual Handling is essential for education on hazard recognition, risk appraisal, and knowing how one should act.

But training mustn't be your only answer to the problem of safe manual handling. Wise managers will look beyond training and use culture and environment to shape behaviour to ensure staff pause to consider the task ahead of them.

ASSESSING RISK

Injury type awareness

- **Stretching Strains** - musculoskeletal strains from overreaching to store, move or select items ie: reaching over the foremost stock to the best shrub at the back of the display.
- **Load Strains** - musculoskeletal strains from heavy item lifting, carrying, or twisting under load, or fatigue from prolonged load ie: lifting and carrying heavy items to the till.
- **Crush or impact injuries** from dropped or unbalanced loads falling on feet and toes.
- **Trips, collision, crushes or impalement** - from movement under reduced visibility or coordination ie. carrying large sheet items like trellis, or unevenly loaded pallet trucks.
- **Secondary risks**, spills, slips, hazardous breakages etc. ie: sharp glass or ceramic breakages.



RISK FACTORS TO CONSIDER IN A GARDEN CENTRE

Looking at the workplace and workflows, what conditions and circumstances might be risk factors to cause those injuries?

People

Staff are frequently engaged in picking, lifting, loading, and carrying activities and sometimes whilst multi-tasking ie: handling while talking to customers creates distraction, mixed focuses, and applies time pressures.

Consider individuals have different strength, health and fitness for lifting.

Typical activity Risks

- Moving, loading, unloading, orientating and transporting potentially very heavy items.
- Pushing and pulling of loads on trolleys, sack trucks and pallet trucks.
- Irregular product masses - uneven loads with risk of overbalance.
- Awkward product shapes and forms - from bulky and difficult to grasp to delicate ie. a large plant encourages imbalanced handling to protect branches or stems.
- High level storage of items - i.e. heavy pots at height on racking or shelving.

Atypical activity Risks - seasonal displays

Atypical handling during seasonal or promotional reconfiguration of retail space, often involving large and heavy scene dressing and ornamentation ie. a water feature display or christmas display.

Work Environment

Multiple flooring surfaces - slips and trips risk while handling and traversing outdoor and indoor surfaces ie. solid flooring to gravel, steps and multi-levels, slopes, doors etc.

Tools and Equipment – trolleys, sack truck, pallet trucks, lift trucks

- Risk from improper use of equipment ie overloading, uneven loads, pushing not pulling, use on uneven flooring or use of damaged trolleys.
- Risk from underutilisation of provided equipment ie heavy items should be lifted with a mechanical handling aid where practicable rather than manual handling.

HINTS FOR YOUR RISK ASSESSMENT

Observe staff handling behaviour and consult them when conducting a manual handling risk assessment to be sure you are assessing the task accurately and finding workable solutions to reduce the risk of handling injury.

Hopefully you've found some useful ideas here. In the next article we look at the Risk Area of Workplace Transport.



2. WORKPLACE TRANSPORT: SAFER DRIVERS, SAFER SITES

Your garden centre will only thrive if shelves and aisles are re-stocked and new seasonal product lines reach the front line. This is only possible with regular deliveries. However this presents garden centres with a key risk - that of vehicle & pedestrian collision.

ASSESSING RISK

Each garden centre will have different layouts and space constraints so you will need to evaluate your workplace transport circumstances in a rigorous way to identify issues and potential solutions.

Risk Factors to consider in a garden centre

- **Vehicle and pedestrian collision from:**
 - Forklift truck movements.
 - Reversing lorries.
 - Car movements.
 - Visiting drivers - unfamiliar with site and safety rules.
- **Falling loads or falling drivers - from lorry loading and unloading.**

REDUCING RISK

Segregation

Forklifts and lorries should be segregated from pedestrians as far as possible by use of designated customer parking, pedestrian walkways, barriers, areas out of bounds to customers (using signage) and adequate lighting and site layout. Training key staff as a 'watchman' to walk alongside a forklift operating unavoidably in a customer area is recommended - you never know when a child is going to dart out!

Loading and unloading safely

During loading and unloading there is a risk of falling loads or drivers falling from the back of flatbed lorries. All loading activities should be conducted away from customers in a designated well-lit area, clear of traffic and overhead obstructions. Where access onto the back of a flatbed is essential, drivers should use the vehicle mounted ladder access and wear a hard hat with restraining device.

Driving safety and visiting drivers

A quarter of on-site accidents and deaths occur when vehicles are reversing¹, which means that all possible precautions should be taken to ensure the safety of workers and customers at your garden centre. This process should start with ensuring that site layouts

have correct speed limits, signage, and lighting in place and that load safety is adhered to².

It is the company's responsibility to safely segregate lorries and pedestrians and in particular, reduce the risks associated with reversing through the implementation of a one-way system where possible. Visiting drivers should be given clear site safety instructions and directions so they know where to go and what the site-specific safety rules are.

SUMMARY

Don't turn a blind eye to dangerous driving practices at your garden centre. Accidents involving vehicles at work are still the most common cause of workplace fatality and the mix of customers, young and old with forklift trucks, lorries and cars is a critical risk area to assess and control.

Hopefully you've found some useful tips here. In the next article we look at the Risk Area of Slips, Trips and Falls.

3. SLIPS, TRIPS & FALLS: HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

In contrast to the above section, the main problem for Slips, Trips & Falls is that there's normally no opportunity to consider the hazard.

No-one stops to decide whether to trip or not. It just happens.

And it happens because we're not aware of the hazard in that moment. If the hazard was clear, it would pose no threat we could easily adjust for it - change pace, hold rail, step over or around.

Managers should focus on removing likely hazards from their site, and crucially, anything which might disguise a hazard. Finally, make any remaining hazards clear so that people can notice and adjust for them.

ASSESSING RISK

Direct Causes

- **Edges and level changes** - steps, kerbs, uneven surfaces, floor-level changes, and joins.
- **Obstacles** -
 - Static features - such as low walls, fixed displays.
 - Stock - large pot plants.
 - Dynamic items such as workplace tools, trailing hoses, temporary cabling etc.

Unsecured and dislodged products -

- Direct hits - items falling from racking, or toppling items ie. saplings.
- Spillage creating slipping hazards, fallen products creating new tripping hazards etc.
- **Slips** - water and liquids especially common in greenhouse areas, wet leaves, seasonal gritting for ice, moss and slime around water features etc.

Indirect or Circumstantial Causes

- **Poor lighting and visibility** - inside and out ie. steps hidden in shadows on bright days.
- **Handling particular objects which block proper vision of the walkways** ie. carrying a Christmas tree down steps.

ASSESSMENT HINTS

Think of the static environment

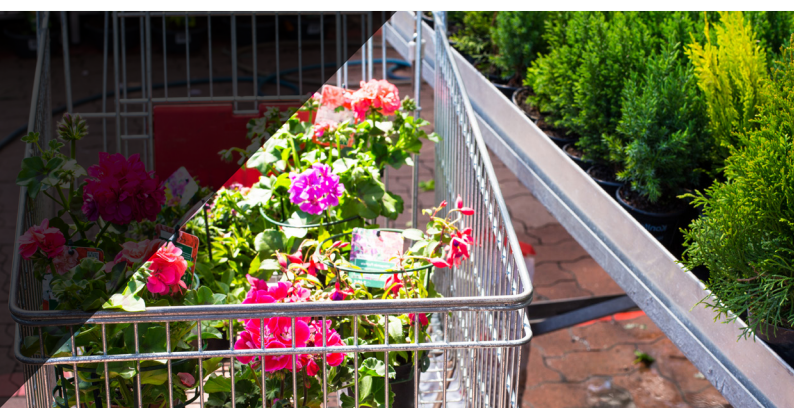
Try to see your environment with new eyes and walk along the traffic routes - you might find unexpected distractions ie. blinding reflections from the sun hide a step at certain times of the day/seasons.

Think beyond the 'average visitor' to the edge cases

Think of the most vulnerable or at risk; people with poor eyesight, elderly, or children. Ensure that you are up to code ie. accessibility obligations, handrails on stairs etc.

Think of the dynamic environment and the different routine and unusual activities that take place.

- **Daily:** watering plants creates a trip risk with hoses and a potential slip risk from water run-off.
- **Weekly:** hedge trimming creates tripping risk from cables.
- **Seasonal:** icy days create slipping hazards.





Modify the Environment

- Focus on flooring - ensure that steps and changes in level are clearly highlighted.
- Ensure that there is adequate lighting.
- Ensure that shelving or racking is sound and secure.
- Secure all items with the potential to topple. ie. saplings, poles etc.
- Secure or house long term cabling, hoses etc. ie. electrical cables for water features.
- Ensure that there are practical store spaces for tools to be secured and keep a tidy environment ie. hoses can be neatly coiled and secured.

SUMMARY

Take a proactive approach - aim to shape the environment to remove the hazards, and if they cannot be removed completely, make them clearly visible so staff and customers can act to avoid them.

Hopefully you've found some useful tips here. In the next article we look at the Risk Area around Water Features.

REDUCING RISK

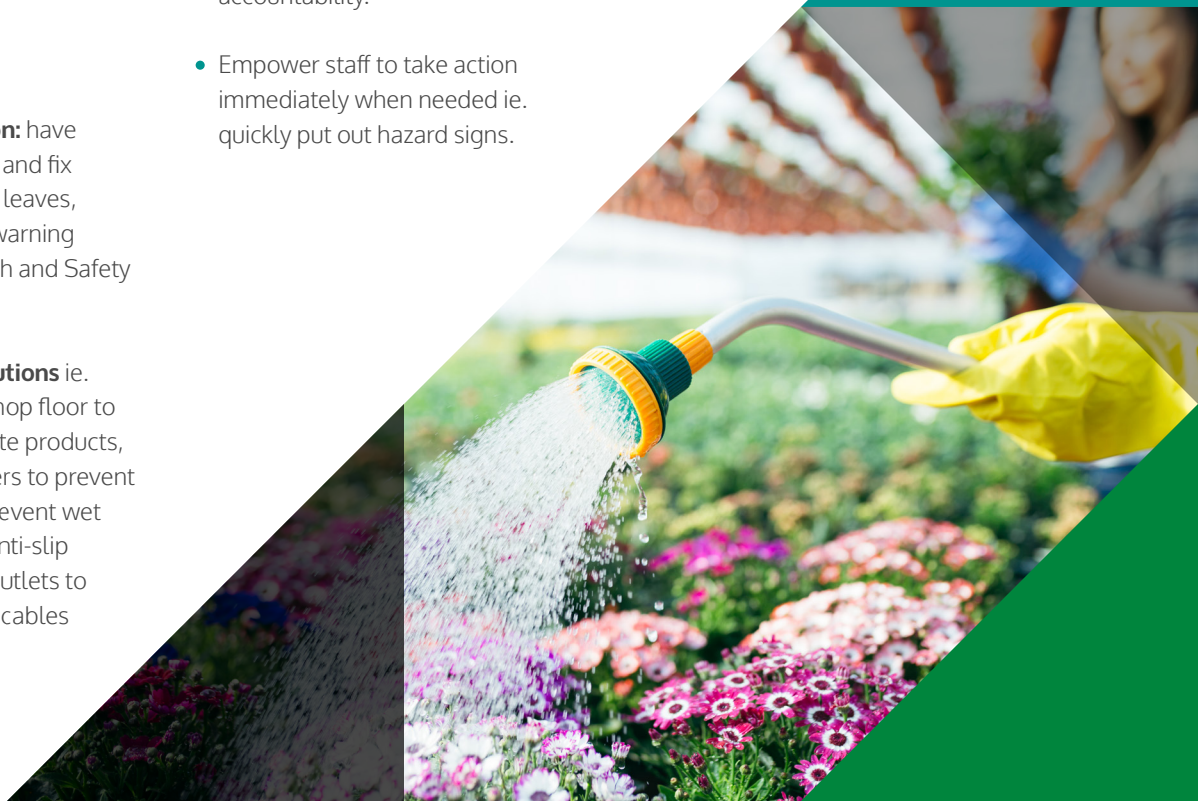
When you've identified your hazards, take action to prevent or minimise them.

Be Proactive

- **Be active and take action:** have edges marked, fill holes and fix uneven floor areas, rake leaves, store tools, use hazard warning signs according to Health and Safety guidelines.
- **Look for systematic solutions** ie. re-lay out areas of the shop floor to improve visibility, relocate products, fix leaks in roofs or gutters to prevent puddles, trim trees to prevent wet leaves, seek advice on anti-slip surfaces, extend utility outlets to avoid trailing hoses and cables across walkways.

Train Staff

- Establish clean-up procedures (including puddles and winter gritting etc.) and duties and accountability.
- Empower staff to take action immediately when needed ie. quickly put out hazard signs.



4. WATER FEATURES: BUGS IN THE SYSTEM

Water features look great and are the centre piece in many garden centres. They carry obvious risks in mixing water and electrics, but in this fourth article of our Top 5 Health and Safety Risk Areas series we consider a hidden danger in the water itself.

LEGIONELLA

Legionella is a bacterium which can cause a range of diseases including Legionnaires' disease. Legionnaires' disease is potentially fatal. Everyone is susceptible to infection.

Where does it occur?

Legionella is commonly found in natural water sources such as rivers, lakes and reservoirs, as well as soils. Infection is more likely where the bacteria multiply in artificial environments such as contaminated water storage, air conditioning or hot tubs.

How is the disease transmitted?

By the inhalation of water droplets containing the bacteria ie. aerosols, mists.

What are the risk conditions?

The chance of infection is highest when the bacteria multiply to high concentrations. This is most likely in a nutrient rich environment with water between 25°C and 45°C, however, bacteria can also survive and lay dormant in cooler waters.

ASSESSING RISK

It is a requirement under COSHH to do a risk assessment for Legionella. Your assessment should include:

- A description of your water system.
- Any identified potential risk sources and any means of preventing the risk, or controls in place to manage risks.
- Monitoring, inspection and maintenance review procedures and records of the checks carried out.

As you assess the risks on your site, think of the:

1. Potential for Bacterial Accumulation or Growth

Identify potential risk sources and conditions which are likely to either; encourage bacteria to enter your system, or provide an environment in which bacteria can multiply.

- Where water is taken from natural sources, especially bore holes.
- Areas of the system where water temperature is between 20 and 45°C ie. artificially heated, or, naturally in warm seasons and parts of the day, by direct exposure to sun etc.
- Areas where water is stored or re-circulated as part of your system

- Areas where there are sources of nutrients such as rust, sludge, scale, organic matter and biofilms.

2. Potential for Transmission

Identify the potential for water droplets to be produced and, if so, whether they can be dispersed over a wide area. Consider; splashing water features and fountains in the wind, greenhouse misting systems or automatic watering systems, active hot tub displays, staff showers etc.

3. Potential for Vulnerability

Age (young or old), illness, or a weakened immune system increases vulnerability.



REDUCING RISK

If you are confident that your Risk Assessment concludes there is no reasonably foreseeable risk, or the risks are low and are being properly managed to comply with the law, you may not need to take any further action at this stage. Typically though, Garden Centres will need to take additional steps to minimize risk. We recommend the following actions:

Treat or change water sources to avoid initial contamination

- First, aim to prevent the risk of legionella contamination on site by considering the source of your water. For a potentially risky source, such as a bore hole, consider changing to an alternative such as treated mains water.

- Use filters, chemical biocides or chlorination where appropriate:
 - to treat the water source at inlet to prevent the entrance of bacteria.
 - to treat currently stored water, such as tanks, ponds and water features, to eradicate any current bacteria presence.

Carry out On-going Monitoring of water sources and stores

- Implement a legionella monitoring plan and maintain test records ie. monthly water temperature checks and bacterial level monitoring.
- Immediately take action to treat or clean build-up before it becomes problematic.

Control Growth Conditions - minimise potential for bacteria growth

- **Temperature:** avoid water temperatures and conditions that favour the growth of legionella and other micro-organisms (25 - 45°C).
- **Stagnation:** ensure water cannot stagnate anywhere in the system, keep pipe lengths as short as possible, remove redundant pipework, drain or regularly flush hoses, irrigation or sprinkler systems etc. before storage. Don't forget fire sprinkler systems.

- **Limit nutrition:** provide lids to stored water tanks to prevent rodent or bird entry and biofilm from forming.

Act to Minimise risk of transmission or dispersal

- Minimise the use of water atomisation (watering mists etc.)
- Train staff on awareness of the signs and symptoms of legionellosis.

SUMMARY

Do not underestimate the threat from legionella. Individuals on your site cannot protect themselves, they rely on your management and systematic solutions. Adjust your water system to minimise the chance of bacterial occurrence. Establish treatment, cleaning and regular monitoring processes to help prevent bacterial build-up.

Hopefully you've found some useful information here. In the next article we look at the Risk Area around Fire.



5. FIRE RISKS: GETTING A GOOD RESPONSE TO A BAD SITUATION

Why are we highlighting fire risks at a garden centre?

It may be surprising to include re in our top 5 risks for garden centres; they seem to have a relatively low re risk due to being... gardeny.

Underestimated Risk

In fact, this is itself one of the reasons fire is included on the list; we've found fire to be a generally underestimated threat in garden centres and consequently sufficient measures are often lacking.

ASSESSING RISK

Identify Ignition Sources

- Electrical appliances, heaters, lighting, naked flames, smokers' materials and anything else that can cause sparks or get very hot ie. cable terminals, motors, focused sunlight.

Fuels on Site

- Flammable products, packaging and wastes.
- Seasonal firework sales.
- Propellants ie. LPG bottles
- Items which produce toxic release under combustion - fumes, toxic gases etc.

Identify People at Risk

- Staff, customers, contractors, visiting drivers etc.

Re-review identified fire risks with any significant changes of displays, features or product layouts with respect to:

- Emergency routes and exits.
- Fire detection and warning systems.
- Fire-fighting equipment.

ASSESSING RISK

You should:

- put in place, and maintain, appropriate fire safety measures.
- plan for an emergency - create a fire emergency plan.
- provide staff with fire safety awareness training.

Prevent ignition

- **Avoid direct accidental fires.** Secure patio and electric heaters so they cannot be knocked over. Ban all personal portable electric heaters. Provide cigarette bins.
- **Minimize latent ignition sources.** Ensure all electrics are checked and appliances are tested and in safe working order (PAT tested).
- **Store flammable items away from potential ignition points.** ie. don't stack cardboard near electrical points, radiators or other sources of heat.

Minimize Fuel Availability

- Keep sources of ignition and flammable substances apart.
- Consult your suppliers' safety data sheets and know what's flammable,

under what conditions, what happens on combustion, and store accordingly.

- Practice good housekeeping and clear out flammable rubbish.
- Store highly flammable substances such as LPG bottles safely in accordance with regulations.

Rapid Fire Detection and Suppression

- Install and regularly test **fire detection** and **warning** systems.
- **Systems:** Install and regularly test automatic **fire suppression** systems appropriate to your site ie. sprinkler systems.
- **Manual:** Provide clearly marked fire extinguishers to combat minor fires. Locate based on fire potential and type.



SHAPING RESPONSE

In the event of a fire, you must have an emergency plan. Practice and document fire evacuation drills. Observe and learn from real staff and customer behaviour. Use this to inform your fire emergency plan.

Staff Response

- Leading by example - ensure staff receive appropriate training on procedures, fire drills and escape routes, so they can remain calm and provide efficient leadership to customers.
- Establish clear protocols and responsibilities ie. who calls for emergency service assistance, under what specific circumstances, who is responsible for checking each section is clear of people, roll-calls etc.

SUMMARY

Don't underestimate fire risk, take action to minimise the chance of ignition and spread. Look at the real day-to-day activities and uses of spaces and factor those into your plans.

Where would be the worst places to have fires and what can be done to minimise the risk in those locations?

WANT TO LEARN MORE...?

Southalls offers a range of safety management programs for retail garden centres.

To book a **FREE** software demonstration or a consultation, or to simply learn more about how we can help you to protect your business and employees, visit us at

www.southalls.com

REFERENCES

¹ <http://www.buildersmerchantsjournal.net/travis-perkins-fined-2m-after-customer-death>

² <http://www.hse.gov.uk/pUbns/priced/hsg136.pdf>





Cranmore Place, Cranmore Drive
Solihull B90 4RZ

t 0345 257 4015
f 0871 714 5973
e hello@southalls.com
www.southalls.com

DEFINING SAFETY EXCELLENCE.