



# Landscape Ontario Podcast

## Safety First:

### The benefits of building a safety culture

**Host:** Karina Sinclair

**Guest:** Peter Guinane, Co-founder Oriole Landscaping

## Transcription

### INTRO:

Karina: Safety is the name of the game in this episode of the Landscape Ontario Podcast. I'm your host, Karina Sinclair. My goal today is to help ensure everyone returns home at the end of their workday safe and sound, so I've brought in Peter Guinane to talk about jobsite safety. Peter is a co-founder of Oriole Landscaping, an award-winning full-service landscaping company in Toronto, Ontario. With nearly 40 years at the helm, Peter has developed a strong culture of safety at Oriole so that it's top of mind every single day.

We are on the cusp of the 2025 spring rush for landscapers and there's no better time to pause and consider the safety culture at your company. Whether you're a business owner, a supervisor or a brand new hire, everyone plays an important role in keeping a workplace safe. And not just for yourself, but for your crew mates, too. By taking the time to **identify** potential hazards, **remove** hazards, **train** for proper handling and operation, and **enforce** the use of personal protective equipment, you can reduce the chances of jobsite injury, or worse. And it's not just a nice thing to do — there are legal requirements and ramifications around safety that you **need** to know about.

Stick around for this important and timely interview with Peter Guinane, and find out what some of the most common injuries on a landscape jobsite are and what to do if an inspector comes around. You might want to share this with your teammates, too, because it never hurts to get a refresher on safety.

## Music transition

### Interview:

Karina: Welcome to the show, Peter. I'm really glad that you're here, because I know that you have decades of experience running a crew. Many crews, actually, for a very successful landscaping company in Toronto, and I figured that you would have a lot of experience onboarding new crews, new staff members, and ensuring that they have all the safety protocols and knowledge that they need to go into a busy spring season, safe and healthy and sound.

So thank you for coming on the show today to talk about how you were successful in that and to share some advice on how to keep a safety culture going in a business.

Peter: Thanks, Karina. Happy to be here. Happy to share what I've learned. And you did list a lot in that intro. It is a big task, and I do try to do all of it. And I think we're pretty good at getting it all done, but it's a constant work in progress.

Karina: Absolutely. I mean, there's so much to know. And there's a lot that people need to know that maybe they don't or they're unaware of. We can talk a little bit about some of the regulations and requirements from the law a little bit later. But first, I want to begin with: how did you originally learn about safety best practices? How did you build those skills yourself?

Peter: Well, we started our company with very little knowledge of what was involved in the industry. What was required legally. We did a lot of things incorrectly for many years, and we thought we were just great at landscaping. We had, I guess, our first introduction to being better and safer was with the Ministry of Transportation (MTO).

Landscape Ontario used to have Safety Group sessions. The ones I went to a long time ago had these MTO information sessions and I discovered that a lot of the practices I was doing with my transportation of materials, equipment, and how heavily I was loading the vehicles at the trailers — a lot of it was illegal. And we were pretty surprised. And we had to make some changes to how we operated the types of trucks and trailers we were buying and that opened

our mind up and we started that process of learning. And that was probably the biggest resource we used.

Karina: And what were some of the courses or programs in those early days that helped you with the jobsite safety aspect?

Peter: WSP, which was sponsoring a program where we would get a discount, and they had safety groups. And Landscape Ontario sponsored a safety group. So we went to headquarters in Milton, and everything was in person back then in the late 90s or early 2000. But the safety group program was to develop safety policies, and not just following the Ministry of Labour Green Book guidelines and construction guidelines, but in developing your own internal company policies because the law really just states the minimum requirements on a jobsite.

But how you operate your business is going to be unique and customized for the type of work you do. So you have to have specific policies that address how you work. Those safety groups were great. I think it was a multi-year program that I was in. I don't know if it was a five year program or not, or a four year program, but every year we would go through another set of policies. And at the end of the program, I think we had to do five safety policies each session. So I think at the end of the program, I had 25 safety policies specifically written for my company. And since then, we've been able to use that technique and that format to develop additional safety policies.

I have one interesting side story. We were doing a job at Ontario Place. We had to rebuild the shoreline, and it was a government contract, and there were a lot of people involved, probably more people involved in the administration than the actual installation.

But, they required a safety policy for working near water. A company specific safety policy. And I had about six hours to pull this thing together before I had a site meeting, and I just took everything I had learned in the safety groups. I copied the format and came up with a safety plan for working near water that we still use today. And that was like, that was a long time ago. 10 or 15 years ago and it's very helpful and it's good to have. I mean, we want to be safe and it's going through this policy knowing what the hazards are, knowing how to clearly define the

hazards in a process, and training your staff that takes practice. So I'm glad to have learned of it at Landscape Ontario.

Karina: All those different policies, I mean, landscape crews have such a wide variety of tasks that they might do. And a maintenance crew does something different than an enhancement crew so their safety hazards might require different policies. That's interesting that you got such a breadth of information from those early safety group sessions. Now, since doing that, how have you continued to establish that culture of safety at your company? And has it evolved over the years?

Peter: Yeah. There is a formal process for maintaining your safe practices. Because our company had 20 people in it at the time, we were required to form a Joint Health and Safety Committee. And the purpose of this safety committee is to meet regularly, to review hazards, to review incidents, to recommend policy changes or or training improvements or or both.

And that process, again, is mandated to include workers. There has to be a worker rep on the Joint Health and Safety Committee. I used to be the management rep. So it would force us to sit down and talk about safety and to review incidents and to try and mitigate risk. And through that process, we have developed new policies or adapted old policies to fit a better way to operate. So that has continued.

We're still just under 50 employees right now, so we haven't yet flipped to the next level where we have to have a bigger joint health and safety. We have different reporting requirements, but that's ongoing. We have to meet four times a year for the Joint Health and Safety Committee, and now it's all employees.

I have a manager that meets as a management rep, and we have a worker that gets elected by the staff to represent the workers. And that work continues.

Karina: And this applies to not just the field workers but those in the office as well. Like, we can't forget that those who are working in administration or in the back office also have requirements for safety.

Peter: Yeah, there are some people in the office that never go to the jobsite, but we have hazards in the yard, for example, outside of our office adjacent to the office. So they have to be aware of what those hazards are. They can simply avoid the hazards by not going into those spaces, which is also one of our policies.

We have a visitor policy for our office to keep visitors safe as well. There's all kinds of layers. And again, through, experience, we have learned that some of the officers in the company — executive vice president, president, etc., — if they're not on the tools, if you can demonstrate they're not on the jobsite, they can be charged a different, lower WSIB rate than the workers who are on the jobsites and on the tools. That saved us a lot of money.

We got audited by WSIB many, many years ago. And, it was nerve racking because we had a lot of documentation to provide, but we had everything in order. And the only mistake we had is that we hadn't identified those executives, and the auditor actually said that we're eligible for a credit for the WSIB we had paid. We actually got a cheque from them after the audit. And I was like "that's the first and maybe the last time an audit will ever go so well for anyone."

Karina: What triggered the audit?

Peter: I'm not sure. I think they do random audits occasionally. Or maybe I did something dumb on one of my forms that I sent in and they flagged it. I don't know, but we did have all our paperwork and they found a way to save us more money, actually.

Karina: So that's a good reminder for any other company who imagines "we're just a small company. They're not going to bother checking on us," but they could! They could just show up at any point and want to see all your documentation. And maybe there's a bonus of getting some money back. That's fantastic!

Regarding the Joint Health and Safety Committee, before we move on, what size of company requires that?

Peter: 20 employees.

Karina: And then it changes once you have over 50?

Peter: And when you have over 50. So right now, we have to have one worker rep and one management rep on the committee, and at 50, I believe it changes to two worker reps and two management reps. So it's just a larger committee. We do have an observer that sits in on the committee meeting occasionally. So the meeting is sometimes three or four people but there are two required attendees and they have to be trained. So you go through a training process to know how to do the job of the Joint Health and Safety Committee. There are obligations to go through it properly, to document it properly, to respond to questions. There are protections for workers and the Joint Health and Safety Committee so that horrible bosses can't impinge on their freedom to investigate or penalize them for calling out unsafe practices because, you know, a bad boss obviously, if it's going to cost them money or put them in at risk legally, they unsurprisingly might get upset.

Karina: Right. And those employees who participate in a Joint Health and Safety Committee, that's not a volunteer position, right? That is something that is part of their salary or their payment, right?

Peter: Yeah. No, they have the training period. They get paid for labour by salary to participate in that course, to become certified and then the actual meetings themselves, they have to be paid. If they go out to do a site inspection or they get called to do an investigation of an incident, they would all be paid as normal.

Karina: Okay. Besides that committee, what are some of the other things that you have that are non-negotiable in your company? What is it that really helps those employees feel safe and watch out for safety?

Peter: We have a notice board, you know, a message board. And we're obligated to have a lot of our safety stuff up on there. And I guess the message that we have on the notice board, in the message we try to put out in our meetings is that we have to be openminded. That we have to be safe to communicate, to talk to each other. More often than not, it's about asking good questions like, is this safe? Maybe it is safe and you just don't understand how we're protecting the jobsite. Or maybe you haven't been trained on how to work in this particular environment.

Or maybe it is unsafe. Maybe something was missed and I'd rather people ask. And if it is safe, we can explain how it's safe and how they can keep themselves safe. If it isn't safe, then thank goodness they pointed it out before something happened. So I guess the culture piece is about making a safe place to speak out.

You know, we don't fire a lot of people at Oriole. We don't have to, thankfully. There's only been one safety violation that required immediate dismissal. And that's in 39 years.

Karina: Wow.

Peter: There is only one incident where it was just grossly unsafe. They were oblivious to the risk that they were putting people in and cavalier about it when we brought it up. They clearly were not a good fit.

Karina: Right. So that no nonsense, zero tolerance approach to safety risks, seems to be pretty important. How about with regards to PPE? How do you make sure that that is always adhered to?

Peter: So that is part of the constant battle that I alluded to at the beginning. We do have safety footwear as a requirement to come to work, and that's hard to forget because you can get sent home for not coming with the right footwear. So once you have your boots on, you're pretty much done for the day. You're not going to make a mistake. All of our uniforms have high-viz, reflective material on them. So you have a jacket, you have a sweatshirt, you have a t-shirt. It doesn't matter which layer you're wearing. It's going to be high-viz, so I don't have to worry about people forgetting to put on a vest.

The ones that are harder to enforce are safety glasses, hearing protection. Dust masks and hard hats and gloves, because those things people are constantly putting on and taking off when they enter into a dangerous or risky environment. So that one requires reminding.

There's a nudge theory where you're just making a space where it's hard for them to forget. So, you know, we try to have signage up to remind people. Hard hats is probably the one we use the least, because we're not often in a situation where there's a risk of something happening.

But eye protection. Hearing protection all the time. And dust masks when we're in a dusty environment, that one's pretty easy. Nobody wants to breathe that stuff. And gloves. Gloves are maybe a hard one. They're bulky, it's hot. They don't have the dexterity they do with bare hands.

Karina: I imagine that there's a lot of those little tasks that somebody might think, "It's only going to take me two seconds to do this, I'll be fine." Does that kind of thing come up often for you?

Peter: Oh yeah. Yeah yeah, yeah. No, it's I mean, I'm guilty of it myself. Thankfully, I just don't cut things that often, but yeah, it was something I was definitely guilty of. I remember back when we started out and I'd be cutting with a quick cut saw and there'd be dust blowing all over, and I would just try and stand so the wind would blow so that the dust would go behind me, and I'd get the fresh air in my face. I think I was feeling that was a clever way to do the job. And it didn't even occur to me that, you know, I'm putting the rest of the jobsite in harm's way with all this dust. I think a lot of us old school — we were a bit like cowboys back then. So it takes time and yeah, I need to be reminded.

Hearing protection is a tough one, too, because it's, you know, one second of a loud noise is, you know, you don't even realize you need protection until after the sound has come and gone. And then you have to go get your hearing protection and you have to put it on and you take it off because you want to talk to somebody and it can be a nuisance. But the last thing we want is for anyone to have deteriorating hearing, or get something in their eye, or lung disease, all of these things are real problems. And we constantly talk about it. We encourage our staff to comment for their colleagues, you know, protect your neighbor and they will protect you. And, it's a culture thing. And we're pretty good, I'd say, on those little PPE questions. We got to be like 90% or 95% compliant. But that 5 or 10% that we're missing on some days, we've just got to say something. If we don't say something, then you're implying it's permitted. And it's only going to get worse if you don't say anything.

Karina: Right. It's a slippery slope after that point, if it's ignored once, then it's twice and then it becomes a habit where people just don't bother to run back to the truck to pick up their eyewear or whatever they might need for that job. But to be able to nudge your crew member

and say, “hey, I want to see you protected, go put your glasses on” and be held accountable that way for each other seems to be a pretty important element of that safety culture.

Is it worked into training, for instance when you're onboarding new staff, is that something that's specifically talked about?

Peter: Yeah. When we're doing training, there's safety training. And that's part of the onboarding. Then there's specific tool training where you're learning how to use a piece of equipment or use a hand tool. As part of that process, we use on-the-job training (OJT). And, the safety requirements and the potential hazards are integrated into that OJT training.

We all know what we're supposed to do. So that part is established. The next thing is, do we all know that we're counting on each other to follow through with all of that? That's the next thing that requires steady reminding.

Karina: For those who aren't familiar with OJT, that stands for “on the job training.”

Do you find that you get better compliance from experienced staff, those who've been on your crews for many, many years or from those brand new entering — who might be young people, newcomers to Canada, people pivoting, having a second career in landscaping — who do you think is more compliant or eager to embrace safety?

Peter: I would love to say that people who have the experience and know what the real risk is, but it's not. You know, sometimes it's the experienced staff who feel more confident in their skill that, you know, they're not going to make that mistake because they know better. And, you know, ‘I didn't get hurt when I was younger and I used to do it like that. So I'm not going to get anything in my eye for just one quick cut.’

But obviously the risk is cumulative. It's a very small risk on any of the individual actions. But it's just if you're doing it regularly, sooner or later you're going to fall victim to those odds.

Karina: That's right. So it's good that we give reminders to people at all levels of a company and all levels of experience, because this is one thing you don't want to be lackadaisical about.

We touched on some of the things that might be at risk, like people getting something in their eyes. Some hearing damage. What are some other common injuries that might happen on the landscaping worksite?

Peter: The three most common injuries that we've had, and thankfully, it's not that common, but we have obviously back injuries. So people lifting a little too much or moving in an awkward way or just fatigue from doing repetitive action. So, you know, trying to create a system or an environment where they require back strength less. We have equipment on every jobsite to assist with lifting. We have teammates on every site. We don't have anyone working by themselves. You can get a hand when you're trying to lift something so you're not lifting it awkwardly.

The other one is twisted ankles. So the jobsites that we're on, often we're doing excavation or we're putting something new in and we're doing a planting job and there's plant holes and soft soil and hard soil. We're doing hardscaping so there's loose bricks or stone lying around.

Pieces of lumber. The risk of somebody stepping on something awkwardly and rolling their ankle over is actually pretty high. So you have to be aware of where you're stepping. But by the same token, we're often carrying things in our hands and you can't see your feet. You can't necessarily see exactly where your foot lands. So occasionally people will step in an awkward way and roll their ankle over a little bit, and hopefully they catch themselves before it's an injury. But, you know, I'd say at least once a year somebody will go over on their ankle and maybe it's just a light sprain, but it's something we have to constantly try and remind them about.

We've also mandated that people on the jobsite have a boot, not a shoe, like a safety shoe. They have to have a boot with a six inch ankle support. It's not going to prevent 100% of the risk, but it will help provide some support. So yeah, if you start to go over, you feel it, you can catch yourself. You can correct and avoid injury. So that's a big one.

And the third one is lacerations. So we use box cutters sometimes to cut, to remove fibre pots or to cut tags off of stuff or we're using hand tools and if you're not wearing gloves, there's a

good chance that sooner or later, you're going to catch yourself with a tool or one of these box cutters.

Thankfully, that's happened a lot less. It was probably 20 years ago, we had three lacerations in like a month and were like, 'what the heck is happening?' And we had just started the JHSC. I think that was probably one of the first JHSC sort of challenges that we had was how to fix this laceration problem. So, it took us a little while to figure it out, but it was mostly training. I mean, we have gloves. We told people to wear gloves. But again, gloves are still a hard one to get people to wear in the summer when it's hot out. But we did have training developed that helped people learn how to use the tools and be aware of what the risk is. And, knock on wood, we've had a lot fewer of those incidents. But, you know, occasionally, once a year there might be somebody who cuts themselves and needs some stitches.

Karina: So what is your responsibility as the business owner or crew lead when there's an injury on site? What happens then?

Peter: So there's different grades of response depending on what happened. Obviously, if it's an emergency, you have to call 911. Everyone knows that's important. We have a first responder on site. Every crew, every jobsite has a first responder that's trained in CPR and how to respond to an incident. So if it's something they can attend to, they can attend to it. But they all know that 911 is if there's anything that's not treatable on the site or is serious in nature, to just call in the professionals.

Assuming the incident is dealt with properly, either way, we do have to write an incident report. And the supervisor on that jobsite is responsible for completing that report. It has to be submitted within 24 hours. So if they don't do it at the end of the day, they hand it in the next morning. So we have to have an incident report.

If the person required medical attention by a doctor, nurse or clinic, then we have to complete a form seven and submit that to WSIB. If the worker has any lost time, if they can't come back to work the next day, we have to fill in a form seven. So either or both of those would trigger a form seven.

If a worker gets injured and they go home early, I'm required to pay them till the end of the day. So I'm responsible for paying the rest of that day's wages. If they go home at 11:00 or 1:00 or at 8 a.m., I have to pay for the rest of that full day. And the lost time injury doesn't count until the following day, if they miss the following day.

So all of those things come down to the different levels of response and hopefully there isn't lost time. We might have one lost time injury per year where somebody misses a day's work here or there, very low injury rate. But that requires a lot of effort.

We have a modified duties policy in our company. So if somebody, let's say they roll their ankle and their ankle is sore, they go home early. They may or may not go see a doctor if it's really mild. If they see a doctor, I fill out a form seven. If they don't, I don't have to as long as they come to work the next day. If they've rolled their ankle and they want to come to work the next day, I would be required to provide modified duties and if it's something that they can do with the rolled ankle, if I have modified duties available for them, I could keep them employed and I avoid having a lost time injury, which is good for my WSIB record. And the better my record is with the lower incidence of injury, the better my rating is, and then I get a rebate from WSIB if I have a better score on my injury incidents.

Karina: So not only is making safety a priority good for the people working for you (because that's just what good humans do for each other) but it's good for business because you're not missing out on that lost time. You're not delaying your projects. You're benefiting from better insurance rates and all those things just add up. Like, that's worth the money you're putting into the training system to make sure those injuries don't happen.

Peter: Yeah. So the dollars and cents, that calculation could be positive, but that wouldn't even be all of it. And the biggest benefit financially might be a financial benefit you don't see, and that is the well-being of the rest of your staff. If your staff see that you care for them, if your staff see that you are trying to keep them safe so they go home at the end of every day, so they can have a a lifelong career — if your staff get that sense that you're a safe place to work, you will get more engaged staff, you'll get staff that's more likely to come back year after year, willing to commit to making a career of this because they see a future in it.

The soft value in that benefit probably outweighs the actual dollars and cents I get from WSIB.

Karina: And some of those injuries could be so life changing, they could halt somebody's career path in landscaping. If somebody tweaks their back in such a way that manual labour is not something that they could continue doing, that might mean they don't get to do what they always dreamt of doing. So making sure all those rules are in place for allowing people to thrive has so much impact.

With the broader acceptance of PPE and all these other safety measures, why do you suppose accidents still happen on jobsites?

Peter: Yeah. I mean, there are probably as many causes as there are people in the business.

What happens to me when I have a bad night's sleep, and I'm tired the next day? Or my brain is twirling because there's some issue at home or some family member... there's there's so many external factors that can change the way a person is distracted during the day. And it could be something as simple as that, just not paying attention.

It's unfortunate. And it could be avoidable. But, you know, we have a culture of 'keep a stiff upper lip' or...

Karina: "Shake it off. Toughen up."

Peter: "Toughen up, put your head down, just work through it." And, I mean, we need the money. I need the money. I keep doing this every year because I need the money. And I'm sure my staff come to work every morning and they're like, 'yeah, if I didn't have to earn a living, I'd be on a beach somewhere.' They come because they need the money, so they're not going to say, 'you know what? I'm not feeling 100% today. I'm going to take the day off.' I mean, that's expensive. So I'm sure a lot of people put themselves in a situation where they might not be 100% paying attention because we need money and it's unfortunate.

Again, coming back to that culture of safety where it's safe to talk about this stuff. If somebody is on cold medication, which says on the side of the bottle: "do not operate equipment," please

tell me when you're on cold medication and you're not supposed to be using equipment. Then we can find you something else to do that day. Or if you're that sick that you have to be on medication for a cold, maybe you could stay home and take one of your sick days.

So all of these things are happening without us knowing about it. We just have to hope that the culture we've created is enough to create a safe place for them to continue working safely, even when they're not at 100%.

Karina: Right. So setting up safety isn't a one time and you're done sort of situation. You might offer onboarding safety training but how do you keep it going throughout the year? What are some methods that you do at Oriole that keeps safety top of mind and really infuses it in daily practice?

Peter: So we do have tailgate talks and in the maintenance division, they call them huddles. And those we have to do at least once a week where we have topics that are preprinted meeting notes that each crew has a binder of. They go through it, the people on that crew, they'll sign the bottom of it to say, 'okay, we talked about this on April 23rd.' Everybody initials it. They file it away. They have to acknowledge that they were listening, that they heard it, and by taking that time, it's a routine. So we're always thinking about this kind of thing.

We also have monthly barbecues. It's mostly a social sort of get together, but we always make sure there's an announcement and there's some information to remind them what resources we have available to support them. And safety is a big part of it. It's not exclusively about safety. I mean, there's benefits packages that we talk about. There are training packages that we offer for additional training. We make these get-togethers where it's the whole company as special as we can and complete as we can.

We have to do monthly jobsite inspections. When we're on a big site that goes for multiple months we're required by law to inspect the site for its safety risk at least once a month or after any substantial changes in the jobsite. So say a big excavation occurs, well that creates a new major hazard. So we're supposed to do another jobsite inspection.

So creating this culture of saying you have to identify the hazards, you have to be aware of the hazards. You have to identify changes in the hazards. The crew on site is responsible for that report. So again it just reinforces that attention that is required to safety. Just always be thinking about it.

Karina: Let's circle back to that binder you were mentioning a minute ago. I'm imagining that's something that the crew leader would have the domain over of delivering the information and what kind of information might be in that binder. Is it something specific to what they might be doing?

Peter: Hopefully. Yeah. There might be 50 of these meetings in the binder, and a page might be about safe lifting to avoid back injuries. It could be PPE, it could be hazardous materials, it could be fall hazards. It could be any number of things. And hopefully what the crew leader talks about relates to what the week's job is, you know, working around equipment or working in a high traffic area. If we're downtown and we're in a public space, it might be about working and controlling traffic. And that's something that we better be good at when we're doing it. And the public is at risk. So, that's a good week to pull that meeting note out and say, 'okay, this week we're going to talk about how to manage traffic safely.'

So hopefully it's very topical. The binder has a whole range of topics and the crew leader can pick any one that hasn't been done yet this year.

Karina: That's really smart to make it relatable and applicable to what they're doing that day. Because that's what you remember the most, is something that you apply immediately. If there's a project happening and there's enforcement officers from the Ministry of Labour, could they just show up at a jobsite at any point and see that you're doing things properly?

Karina: Yeah. The Ministry of Labour has a program requiring construction sites to register with them. And it would be a 'notice of project' if the construction exceeds \$50,000 in value. And most of our jobs exceed \$50,000 so we're submitting these things constantly. We're required to put the value of the work, the scope of work, the estimated start date, and the estimated completion date. And there's no cost for it. We send them in, we register.

Inspectors working in that area will have a list of all the jobs that are registered. They'll probably spend most of the time worrying about the big jobsites. You know, the big condo development where there's people working all over the place and most of them aren't supervised, but occasionally they will stop in on a small residential job or a small commercial job because they happen to be in the area. They might be inspecting a site next door.

So far in my experience, they have been reasonable in that my staff aren't always 100% compliant. Again, I had a crew. One of these inspectors came by. The Crupi Group was doing some road construction, he did an inspection, and then he stopped by our site because he happened to be there. And he insisted that my staff wear hardhats while they were on this landscaping site, even though they technically didn't need it for their work, but they were just adjacent to all this other road construction. And thankfully, my staff had hardhats in the truck. They put their hardhats on. He said, 'thank you very much.' He didn't write us up for any violations and he went his own way. And my crew was pretty surprised about it, but I guess grateful they didn't get fined or anything.

We had one inspector come by our yard because our yard is listed as a site. So he came to our head office and they just walked around our yard, and they found some metal racking that had rust on it. And he said that it's no longer certified, like, engineered to hold its rated weight and we couldn't have it in the yard. And I'm like, 'well, we know it's old and we don't put heavy stuff on it.' But he says, 'yeah, you know that, but somebody else might put something heavy on it thinking it will hold its rated weight. And then if it falls over, that's a problem.' So he gave us 30 days to comply, to remove it or to get it engineered. And it was much easier to remove it. So he gave us an order to comply and we had to send him pictures. We emailed them a picture of that space with the rack missing, and he was fine. He didn't come back. He just said, 'Fine. I'll close that file, and it's done.' So it's reasonable with no fine. He didn't berate us. We had a discussion about it and came to the safe conclusion.

Karina: I suppose the goal is to not hassle and harass people, but to actually make sure that they're not getting injured so that's a win.

Now that you've been doing this for so many years, what advice would you give to other landscaping companies that are looking to improve their safety culture and making it a priority for everybody on their crews? What advice do you want them to take away?

Peter: Well, I guess the real push for my company was listening to other people. Like, this podcast — I gave you a few key insights but there's so much to learn. And also that Landscape Ontario has these programs that are multi-week or multi-day opportunities to get a lot of information. And really, it's just opening up a door to a world that is that enormous.

I don't know if anyone can know everything about safety, but if you know that there is something to know, that's half the battle.

When you approach a situation, put some safety lens on it and just say, 'what possible things could go wrong, or what's a possible risk with this?' There's probably something you should protect yourself against. And changing the environment is the easiest thing. Avoid the risk. Like, if you don't have the equipment or personal protective equipment for hazardous materials, then don't deal with hazardous materials. Subcontract somebody who has that training.

There's a lot of stuff we still don't do, like confined spaces. You need a permit to work in confined spaces, for example. I have no interest in doing that. So I'm just not going to do it. I know there's a big risk in that. I don't know the details of it. I just know it's a big risk and I'm happy to avoid it.

Karina: So definitely that philosophy of identifying and removing that hazard, applying training and then providing and requiring the PPE, that sounds like a good trifecta for addressing most safety hazards on the jobsite.

Peter: Yeah. And Landscape Ontario is big. That was really the hub of all of our learning.

Karina: It's a reasonable thing to do to send your crew members to attend these workshops on chainsaw safety, getting certified in skid steer operations, working at heights — whatever it might be, there's all kinds of different courses that people can take to address those specific skills.

Thank you so much, Peter, for coming in and sharing your experience. And even with the honesty of some of those things where there was a misstep, but you had the opportunity to learn from it and improve and make things better, and just building your awareness for yourself and that culture for your crew to know that they were looked after. I think that must have a pretty big impact on the enthusiasm people would bring knowing that you want them there safe and sound. So thanks for sharing all that.

Peter: I enjoy sharing it. It is good for me to talk through all of this and it's a reminder to myself of the good things we can do for each other. I'm happy to share it with as many people as will listen to it.

Karina: Fantastic. I hope lots of people do listen today and share this with everyone who needs to hear it.

## **Music transition**

### **Extro:**

If there's one takeaway I hope you get from today's conversation, it's that safety is not a "set it and forget it" kind of chore. It requires daily diligence and regular review. Everyone on the crew, no matter their position, even if they work in the office, is part of the solution, and your dedication to safety could be the reason someone avoids a hazard and goes home injury-free.

Thanks for taking the time to listen to my conversation with Peter Guinane today, and thank you to Peter for sharing the lessons he's learned over the years, and the dedication to continuing to improve safety for his employees.

If you'd like to learn even more about safety requirements and how they apply to landscape businesses, check out the Healthy Horizons column in the upcoming May 2025 issue of *Landscape Trades* magazine.

Relevant links and a transcription of today's conversation can be found on this episode's page at [landscapeontario.com/podcast](https://landscapeontario.com/podcast).



And, of course, I want to hear your thoughts on this episode! Send me your feedback. Send me your ideas for future topics or ideas for guests, or send me a message to just say hello at [podcast@landscapeontario.com](mailto:podcast@landscapeontario.com). Your input helps me continue to bring valuable conversations and insights to the *Landscape Ontario Podcast*.

Thanks for tuning in, and until next time, stay safe! And keep growing!

## **Resources relevant to this episode**

[Oriole Landscaping](#)

[Landscape Ontario training and professional development](#)