

South Carolina Green Industry: COVID-19 Best Safety Practices

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The document provides guidance for individuals working in the plant nursery, greenhouse, sod production, garden center, or landscape industries in South Carolina in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Please find the section that applies to your operation type to find specific guidance on best safety practices for your operation.

Essential Industry Designation: Nurseries, Greenhouses, Sod Producers, and Garden Centers

On April 6, 2020, Governor Henry McMaster issued Executive Order No. 2020-21, instructing individuals to limit movement outside their home, but gave an exemption for those who engage in Essential Business.¹ On April 10, 2020, Hugh Weathers, Commissioner of the SC Department of Agriculture provided agricultural operators, including: *“the planting, growing, fertilizing, or harvesting of crops, ornamental horticulture, floriculture, and turf grasses”* with a letter designating this status as an “Essential Service”.²

Though not required, if you work in a food- or agriculture-related business and would like a permit to present to law enforcement officers if requested “certifying that you are engaged in an essential industry” you can contact the Commissioner’s office staff via email (harndt@scda.sc.gov) or phone 803-734-2179.³ This permit can be presented to a law enforcement official if requested to verify your status as an Essential Food and Agriculture Employee.

Essential Business Designation: Landscapers

On April 6, 2020, Governor McMaster explicitly listed non-essential businesses that were to close,¹ landscapers were not one of them. Rather, South Carolina chose to follow guidance from the Department of Homeland Security memorandum when determining essential businesses.⁴ Landscapers are included in the “Public Works” section of the memorandum, which states: *“Workers such as plumbers, electricians, exterminators, builders, contractors, HVAC Technicians, landscapers, and other service providers who provide services that are necessary to maintaining the safety, sanitation, and essential operation of residences, businesses and buildings such as hospitals, senior living facilities, any temporary construction required to support COVID-19 response.”*⁴

General Guidance and Best Safety Practices for Green Industry Operations During COVID-19 Pandemic

To minimize the spread of COVID-19, the following best practices are recommended⁵:

- When doing business, follow CDC guidelines for COVID-19⁶:
 - Do not shake hands.
 - Upon arrival and when leaving (e.g., your operation, client sites), clean your hands with a 60% alcohol-based hand sanitizer, rubbing until it dries. If soap and water available, wash hands for twenty seconds.
 - Avoid touching your eyes, nose, mouth with unwashed hands.
 - Maintain social distancing: keep six feet (three paces) from non-family members at all times.
 - Cover your mouth and nose with a cloth face cover when around others.
 - Wear gloves when possible and remove only to eat or drink.
 - Cover coughs and sneezes with a tissue or use the inside of your elbow.

- Actively encourage people (e.g., employees, buyers, delivery drivers) to stay off-site if
 - They are sick or showing COVID-19-like symptoms (e.g., dry cough, fever, shortness of breath)—encourage them to seek medical help.
 - They have been in contact with someone who tested positive for COVID-19 within the last fourteen days.
 - They are in a high-risk category (e.g., over the age of 65, have underlying health conditions).

Specific Guidance for Wholesale Nurseries, Greenhouses, and Sod Producers

To minimize the spread of COVID-19, the following best practices are recommended⁵:

- Minimize people working on-site to essential employees (those needed to keep the operation running) and buyers. No additional individuals should be permitted, nor should social gatherings occur.
- For individuals buying or delivering plants or sod, there are two options:
 - Individuals remain in their vehicles as much as possible, limiting person-to-person contact. When possible, nursery, greenhouse, or sod-farm employees should help load or unload plant materials in a designated area to enable drivers to leave premises as soon as possible.
 - Individuals load their own vehicles. A properly outfitted (mask and gloves) employee fills out a “ticket” with plants loaded. Individuals take the “ticket” to a kiosk (the transparent barrier between customer and buyer) to pay.
- High-contact areas and restrooms should be cleaned and sanitized at a minimum of two times per day.
- Have handwashing stations (soap, water, and napkins/paper towels) or hand-sanitizer readily accessible for employees to help them comply with CDC guidelines.

Specific Guidance for Retail Nurseries and Garden Centers

To minimize the spread of COVID-19 at retail nurseries and garden centers the following best practices are recommended⁵:

- Limit the number of individuals who can enter areas to comply with the 20% occupancy limit established April 6, 2020.¹ Occupancy limits technically apply to indoor areas only, but it is good practice to maintain similar density restrictions in outdoor areas to enable social distancing.
- When possible, stores that have online ordering with outside pick-up or delivery options should encourage the use of these instead of in-store shopping.
- Ensure social distancing of non-family members is maintained. Family members can participate in activities together (e.g., picking out plants, standing in line, etc.), but should maintain a minimum of six feet or three paces from all other non-family individuals while shopping and standing in line.
- Sanitize high-traffic surfaces and areas frequently during the day, including restrooms.
- Increase the frequency of cleaning payment devices, pens, tables, and other surfaces.
- Offer handwashing (water, soap, napkins/paper towels, and trash cans) or hand-sanitizing stations throughout the site.
- Train employees on hygiene practices—including frequent, 20-second handwashing with soap and water.
- Eliminate non-essential services (e.g., gardening classes, tours, etc.).
- Eliminate targeted advertising or marketing materials to individuals considered at higher risk of serious illness with COVID-19 by the CDC.⁷
- If an employee appears ill or has symptoms (e.g., dry cough, fever, shortness of breath) upon arrival at work or if symptoms develop during the workday, the employee should immediately be separated from other employees and customers and sent home.

Specific Guidance for Landscapers

To minimize the spread of COVID-19 and ensure worker safety, the following best safety practices are recommended⁸:

- Before going to a client's site for service—contact and gain permission for service from each client. Get and retain documentation (e.g., email or other time/date stamped electronic communication) of permission to continue to service.
- Communicate daily with all staff reinforcing Standard Operating Procedures, best safety practices, and contingency plans.⁸
- Develop a flexible attendance policy, allow any employee who is uncomfortable working to stay home, permitting them to use paid time off or apply for unemployment (assuring their job will be there when pandemic is over).
- Reduce crew size to minimize number of employees who should go into isolation if one person in their crew were to become infected.
- Limit crews to one person per truck or vehicle. All crew personnel should drive individually to the job site.
- Each crew should have one designated vehicle that carries tools and equipment for use by that crew, do not rotate vehicle assignments among crews.
- Minimize sharing of equipment or tools. If sharing is required ensure it is sanitized prior to use by another individual.
- Train crew personnel to maintain social distancing (six feet or three pace distance) from non-family members.
- Develop answers for common client questions so crew members can professionally respond to client questions.
- Be prepared to stop work at any moment if a customer is concerned about safety or health.
- Enforce daily cleaning and sanitation protocols for all common spaces including trucks, equipment, and restrooms. Particularly focus on frequently touched items including tools, handles, steering wheels, etc.
- Minimize opportunities for alternate crews to interact (e.g., common areas, maintenance shop) by staggering crew start times.

References Cited

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