

THE LICA CONTRACTOR

Volume 17, Number 4

Fall 2024



**First LICA Water Management
Forum: A Dynamic Event**

**The Impact of Employee Benefits
on Engagement & Retention**

G.I. Joe Completes Backhoe Training

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The Land Improvement Contractors of America

The LICA Contractor is the official publication of the Land Improvement Contractors of America, dedicated to the professional conservation of soil and water. LICA was founded in 1951 and is today comprised of twenty-four chapters across the continental United States.

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The LICA Contractor welcomes letters, subject to editing for accuracy and brevity. The LICA Contractor also welcomes articles relevant to the land improvement industry. Include your name and daytime phone number for verification purposes. Deadlines are the twenty-first of the month preceding issue date. All unsolicited material must be accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope.

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A Message From the President



Hello everyone,

Today is my deadline to get this letter to Caroline, and I am writing as Michelle and I are busy canning tomato juice. We've been going a bit crazy this summer with tomatoes and green beans.

The LICA Water Management Forum held in June at St. Joseph's College went really well. We had some great volunteers and staff, and the personnel from the college were awesome to work with. Overall the event was well attended, especially the classes and seminars. The plan is to return there for a second forum in 2026.

The 2024 National Summer Convention went well. The tours were very interesting. I attended the Wednesday tour to the Duquesne Incline and Carrie Blast Furnaces and really enjoyed taking in some of the history of Pittsburgh. Our seminars had good participation as well. During the Leadership Panel, we shared our personal journeys as leaders in LICA. We found that none of us had regrets about getting involved in the leading our association. In fact, our roles had improved other aspects of our lives as well, like public speaking or managing our own employees. It was announced at the convention that National CFO Eileen Levy will be retiring. We cannot thank her enough for her hard work and dedication to the LICA organization. We will miss her, but we realize she is only a phone call away.

As the "Membership Madness" membership drive is coming to a close, it is never too late to recruit new members. Be sure to attend your state chapter's summer/fall meeting, and maybe cross a state line to attend your neighboring chapter's meeting too. They are usually fun family events. Growing our membership, along with active participation, is critical to the future success of LICA. Our associates carefully consider these things when making their advertising and sponsorship decisions. We have great relationships with our associates, and I want to keep them with us.

If you are looking to sell or purchase some equipment, please consider the BigIron LICA Focus Auction coming up on Sept. 25th.

I'm looking forward to seeing everyone in Jacksonville, Florida in February 2025.

Tony Cain, National LICA President

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First LICA Water Management Forum: A Dynamic Event

By CAROLINE KRUG, Editor The LICA Contractor

The inaugural LICA Water Management Forum took place at the historic St. Joseph's College in Rensselaer, Indiana, on June 13 and 14, 2024, bringing together water management professionals, contractors, farmers, government officials, and educators for a two-day immersive experience.

Jerry Biuso, Sr., CEO of LICA, had long aspired to organize a comprehensive drainage conference. The perfect venue proved elusive until a meeting with St. Joseph's College, recommended by National LICA President Tony Cain, unveiled the picturesque campus as an ideal space for the LICA Water Management Forum.

Event Highlights

Sponsored by Advanced Drainage Systems (ADS), this forum offered a comprehensive lineup including seminars, equipment demonstrations, indoor and outdoor exhibits, and hands-on training opportunities.

Highlights included:

- An Introduction to Heavy Construction Equipment course, which included classroom training and hands-on experience with a backhoe for one veteran and seven high school students. Sergeant First Class (SFC) Joe Delusant received safety and



Region III VP Adam Cook testing the Electricom simulator

hands-on backhoe training. Three of the high school students who attended the course are interviewing for positions with INLICA members, taking their first steps toward a career in heavy equipment operation.

- A heavy equipment mobile simulator provided by Electricom.
- A high-speed land leveler demonstra-

tion by Shoule.

- A drainage plow demonstration by BRON. Add photo
- GPS demonstrations by Cook's AGPS.
- An OSHA 10-Hour Course, with 17 Students completing the course presented by Electricom
- A nine-hole golf outing that set the

“ We look forward to implementing some great suggestions for the second LICA Water Management Forum, projected for June 2026, ensuring continued success and impact in the water management industry. ”



BRON Plow demonstration

stage for camaraderie the afternoon before the event kicked off.

Additional sponsorship for refreshment breaks was provided by Agri Drain Corp., The Cook Family, Fratco, the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD) and SHoule.

The program was tailored to the interests and needs of current and future water management professionals, ensuring an exploration of the latest advancements in the field.

Education and Networking

A key feature of the forum was the extensive educational component, coordinated by Keegan Kult, Executive Director of the Agricultural Drainage Management Coalition (ADMC). ADMC is an industry led organization and is recognized as a leader in the development and deployment of conservation drainage practices. Keegan has been working with agricultural water management for more than 15 years and has contributed to 100+ edge of field practice installations, development of new conservation practice standards, and to the scientific literature documenting practice performance and cost effectiveness. Leading industry experts and university educators in agriculture shared their insights through a series of informative sessions



Standing room only for the opening session

on topics from industry legislative updates to cutting-edge technologies.

One of the highlights was the presentation on solar-powered drainage lift stations by Jamie Near, which explored the growing popularity and practical applications of solar direct power for operating pumps. This session included detailed case studies and discussions on the design, features, installation, and operation of solar lift stations.

Nick Yaksich provided a comprehensive legislative update, focusing on key bills before Congress that impact land improvement, including the reauthorization of the farm bill and the Waters of the U.S. (WOTUS) regulation. This session highlighted the complexities and potential changes in legislation that could affect the industry.

Sessions also covered the application of GPS technology in farm drainage, with Nate Cook and Joey Schlat-

ter offering insights into the advantages of AGPS and Trimble systems. Another technical session led by Ehsan Ghane discussed the optimal drain spacing to maximize profit, tailored to specific soil, weather, and economic conditions.

Innovations in automated drainage systems were presented by Charlie Schafer, who introduced Agri Drain's Smart Drainage System[®], emphasizing remote monitoring and management for improved crop yields and water conservation. Additionally, Scott Wagner from the USDA-NRCS and Keegan Kult from ADMC shared opportunities and resources available for conservation drainage, offering guidance on working with federal programs and successful pilot projects across the U.S.

Overall, the educational sessions provided valuable knowledge on the latest advancements in water management,

legislative updates, and practical applications, fostering a deeper understanding and engagement among professionals in the field.

The forum offered abundant networking opportunities as well, creating a platform for professionals from across North America to connect, collaborate, and build partnerships. Exhibitors in attendance were the Agricultural Drainage Management Coalition (ADMC), Advanced Drainage Systems (ADS), Agri Drain Corp., the Alliance of Indiana Rural Water (AIRW), BigIron Auctions, BRON, Cook's AGPS, LLC, Electric-Com, Fleetwatcher, Fratco, Indiana 811, Legacy Equipment Company, the LICA Educational Foundation for Veterans, MacAllister Machinery, Marathon Pipe Line, the National Association of Conservation Districts (NACD), Pinion, Prinsco, River Val-



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Outdoor exhibits

ley Pipe, Schlatter's Inc., SHoule, Inc., Springfield Plastics, Inc., and Wolfe Heavy Equipment. Additionally, complimentary booth space was allocated to each LICA state chapter, and we were pleased to have Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, New York and Ohio join us in the exhibit hall.

Venue: St. Joseph's College—More Than a Historic Space

St. Joseph's College, with its historic significance and multi-faceted facilities, served as an ideal location. The venue featured well-equipped classrooms, a

spacious auditorium, and over ten acres of training ground for outdoor exhibits and demonstrations. Given the goal of reopening the college as a vocational school, collaborative efforts with organizations like LICA add momentum to the initiative, fostering awareness and interest in essential careers.

A Successful Event

The event was a huge success, with great attendance and positive feedback from all involved. Special thanks go to all who supported the event, including Nanci Gutwein of Indiana LICA

for her help coordinating the event, Keegan Kult for coordinating the education, Russ Peters of Iowa LICA, and Mike Cook of Michigan LICA, who provided transportation between indoor and outdoor exhibits, the staff of St. Joe, and all the amazing LICA member volunteers who helped on-site throughout the event.

We look forward to implementing some great suggestions for the second LICA Water Management Forum, projected for June 2026, ensuring continued success and impact in the water management industry. ■

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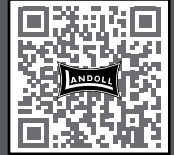
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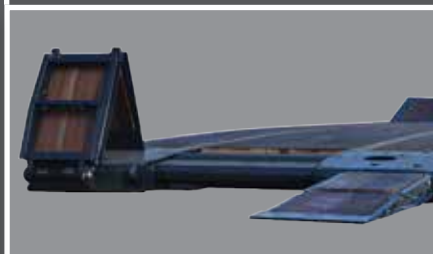
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The Impact of Employee Benefits on Engagement & Retention

Your benefits can make or break employee engagement and retention.

By LINDSAY FUHRMAN, *World Insurance Director of Population Health Management, Employee Benefits*

In today's fast-paced and ever-evolving work environment, the challenge of maintaining high levels of employee retention and engagement has never been more critical. With companies actively competing for top-tier talent amidst a challenging market, employee benefits stand out as a key solution.

These benefits, when tailored and communicated effectively, can become a cornerstone of an organization's culture, directly influencing its ability to engage and retain employees.

Today, we explore the intricate relationship between employee benefits and engagement, along with sharing tried-and-true employee engagement and retention strategies.

The Intersection of Employee Engagement and Employee Retention

Employee engagement refers to the emotional commitment and enthusiasm employees have toward their work and their employer. Engaged employees are passionate about their jobs, feel a sense of connection to the company's mission and values, and are willing to invest effort to contribute to its success.

Engaged employees are often less likely to look elsewhere for a job. According to a recent survey by Gallup, "Engaged employees make it a point to show up to work and do more work - highly engaged business units realize an 81% difference in absenteeism and a 14% difference in productivity."

As you can see, retention, reflecting an organization's capacity to keep its workforce, is significantly impacted by the level of engagement. When employees feel engaged and valued, they are less likely to seek employment elsewhere. This is because engaged employees:

- Feel a strong connection to the company's mission and values.
- Experience job satisfaction, making them less inclined to seek new opportunities.
- Develop relationships with coworkers, which can further increase their reluctance to leave.
- Perceive their growth and development as being invested in by the organization, which encourages them to stay and grow within the company.

The Role of Employee Benefits in Engagement and Retention

When companies increase employee engagement, it can also help boost employee productivity and retention across the board. So, the question then becomes, how can organizations improve the employee experience to leverage these benefits? It often starts with employee benefits.



Benefits play a crucial role in this interconnection of engagement and retention. Beyond the basic expectation of fair compensation and health insurance, providing additional benefits like professional development, work-life balance, and recognition and rewards programs can significantly contribute to an employee's engagement level.

Offering more benefits demonstrates an organization's investment in the well-being and future of its team, enhancing the emotional link between the employee and the employer. Benefits are a foundational part of improving employee retention and engagement.

Employee Engagement and Retention Strategies Using Benefits

If you want to experience the benefits of an engaged workforce, start by evaluating your benefits. There has been plenty of research into why employees leave their jobs, and on the flip side, the types of benefits, recognition, and rewards that encourage them to stay.

Here are a handful of employee engagement and retention strategies that utilize benefits:

• Tailored Benefits Packages

Gone are the days of a one-size-fits-all approach to benefits. Your workforce is comprised of individuals with diverse needs, and it's essential to offer benefits that accommodate their unique situations. For instance, while some employees may value pet insurance, others may not find it relevant to their circumstances.

The experts at the Society for Human Resource Management put it best - make sure to ask your employees what they want rather than just adding benefits because a competitor is. Conduct pulse surveys to gather feedback from employees and encourage them to voice their preferences regarding benefits.



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— Jerry Biuso, National LICA CEO

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This approach ensures the creation of a comprehensive array of rewards tailored to their needs and preferences, increasing the likelihood of utilization.

• Comprehensive Wellness Benefits

Show you care about employee health and happiness. Consider benefits that promote physical and mental well-being, like gym memberships, wellness challenges, mental health resources, or healthy food options in the break room.

While there is a lot of emphasis on physical and mental wellness, you should also consider adding financial wellness to the mix. Harvard Business Review reports that even though 77% of workers view financial wellness programs as an important benefit, only 28% of employers offer them. Offering comprehensive financial wellness benefits can enhance employee loyalty, as employees are more likely to stay with companies that invest in their long-term success.

• Work-Life Balance Benefits

Work-life balance will always be important, especially as more employees are choosing remote work or a hybrid model. The right benefits can help employees achieve a healthy work-life balance. This could include generous paid time off, parental leave policies, or flexible work arrangements.

These benefits are competitive and help improve engagement.

• Professional Development Benefits

Another important aspect of an employee retention strategy is ensuring your team can see themselves at your company for years to come. Providing benefits that show you are invested in their growth is key.

Some examples include tuition reimbursement, access to on-line learning platforms, or industry conferences as benefits to keep them engaged and committed to their career success.

Continuous education also enhances your workforce by ensuring your team members are equipped with the latest knowledge and skills.

• Recognition and Rewards Programs

Finally, do not underestimate how much employee recognition can improve engagement and prevent high turnover. Use benefits to recognize and reward achievements. This could involve bonus structures tied to performance, additional paid time off for exceeding goals, or even public recognition programs.

• A Modern Approach to Employee Benefits

By strategically using benefits, you can create a more attractive workplace, improve employee engagement, and reduce turnover. However, offering a comprehensive benefits plan can also be costly.

When choosing perks to improve employee engagement and retention, remember that more doesn't always mean better. It is important to be strategic and offer a mix of benefits that your team will use and appreciate.

Explore our innovative approach to employee benefits today!

About the Author

For more than 15 years, Lindsay has been executing innovative approaches and best practices to transform well-being and care programs for clients and uses data analytics to inform strategies in the areas of vendor programming, incentive design, and care improvement.



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G.I. JOE Completes Backhoe Training

By EDDY MAYEN, Executive Director of the LICA Educational Foundation for Veterans

During the LICA Forum in June at St. Joseph College in Rensselaer, IN, the LICA Educational Foundation for Veterans conducted a mini backhoe training program. Recently retired Sergeant First Class Joe Delusant, commonly referred to as “G.I. JOE,” a 25-year U.S. Army veteran from New Jersey, successfully completed the training.

The program began with simulator training supplied by ElectriCom. It then moved to the classroom, where National LICA President Tony Cain delivered “An Introduction to Heavy Equipment.” Bob Clark, former National LICA President, spoke on “Backhoe Features and Safety Tips.” Finally, Region III VP Adam Cook led the hands-on training in the field, using equipment provided by MacAllister Caterpillar.

Sergeant First Class Joe Delusant scored a high B+ overall. Everyone was pleased with his performance and believes he can successfully pursue an entry-level operator position on a backhoe. He is expected to further develop his skills on other heavy equipment.



SFC Joe Delusant practicing on the simulator provided by our friends at ElectriCom.



Hands-on operator training on a backhoe provided by our friends at MacAllister Caterpillar. (Left to right: LICA Foundation ED Eddy Mayen, SFC Joe Delusant, Region III VP and Mini-course Instructor Adam Cook, LICA Contractor Editor Caroline Krug)



Region III VP Adam Cook instructs SFC Joe Delusant in the field

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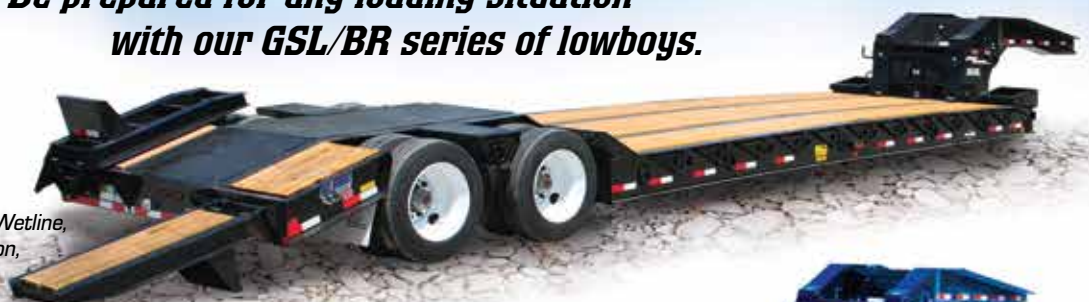
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Discover the Rich History and Evolution of Farm Drainage with LICA's New Book



The Land Improvement Contractors of America (LICA) is proud to announce the publication of its latest book, "The History of Farm Drainage and the LICA Contractor." This essential book takes you through significant milestones and advancements in the field, highlighting the critical role played by LICA.

"The impact LICA has had and continues to have on drainage is a story that had to be told! This book focuses on the dedication and commitment of National LICA, state chapters, and individual members through the years. I took it upon myself to have this book researched, written, and printed. It took six long years to produce this special book. It will stand as a tribute to LICA and its members."

-Gerald Biuso, Sr. National LICA CEO and Founder of the LICA Educational Foundation for Veterans

Key Highlights of the Book

- **Timeline:** Follow a chronological journey through the key events and developments in farm drainage history.
- **The Inception of Farm Drainage:** Explore the early stages and initial practices in farm drainage.
- **The Development of Plastic Pipe:** Learn how LICA members have pioneered advancements in plastic pipe technology.
- **LICA State Chapters:** Get a closer look at the contributions of various state chapters of LICA.
- **Conservation Practices and the Future of Farm Drainage:** Gain a forward-looking perspective on sustainable practices and future trends.

The History of Farm Drainage and the LICA Contractor is an invaluable resource for professionals in land improvement, academics, and anyone with an interest in agricultural history. This book captures the essence of LICA's enduring legacy and the ongoing innovations in farm drainage and water management.

Get Your Copy Today!

Don't miss the opportunity to own this significant piece of history. Order your beautifully bound, hard cover copy of "The History of Farm Drainage and the LICA Contractor" today and embark on a journey through the evolution of farm drainage, celebrating the innovations and contributions of LICA and its members.

Acknowledgements

This project, spanning over six years, has been a labor of love, with extensive research led by Jerry Biuso, Sr., and contributions from LICA members and state chapters, writers Deborah Dickens, Caroline Krug, and Royce G. Morse, along with graphic design by Brenda Basey. From the earliest days of farm drainage to the innovative practices of today, this book highlights the unsung heroes whose contributions have significantly impacted global efforts to feed the world.

For more information or to purchase your copy, please visit licanational.org or contact Caroline Krug at cnational.lica@gmail.com. ■

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Formed in 2018, the Drain Tile Safety Coalition is a non-profit dedicated to sharing best practices in safety to reduce the number of accidents resulting from drain tile installation on farms. Learn more at www.draintilesafety.org



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Loss of Productivity Claims—Legitimate, but Hard to Prove

By CRAIG MARTIN, Construction Attorney with Lamson Dugan and Murray

When you bid on a project, you estimate how long the project will take, how many hours you will have to work, and when you will require equipment on-site. However, if the project is delayed or you are forced to complete the project out of sequence, your budgeted productivity or efficiency may be reduced. When this happens, you may have a claim against an upstream contractor or the owner, but these claims are some of the most difficult to prove. This article addresses some key considerations in making a loss of productivity claim.

Can You Even Make the Claim?

The first assessment in reviewing a loss of productivity claim is determining whether your contract allows for such a claim. Often, construction contracts will limit delay claims to time extensions. Typical clauses provide that “if the project is delayed, contractor’s claim is limited to an extension of the contract time. Contractor waives any claims for increases in the contract sum for any such delays.” If your contract contains a similar clause, an inefficiency claim will likely be immediately rejected outright.

Proving Your Claim

In order to prove your claim, you must establish three elements: liability, causation and damages.

Liability: To prove liability, you must be able to demonstrate that other parties caused the project to be completed in a way that was not anticipated when the contract was signed. This could include errors in the construction plans, encountering unexpected conditions, working out of sequence, stacking of trades or having to work more overtime due to acceleration.

Causation: To prove causation, you must be able to show that your increased costs were actually caused by the delay. This may seem simple, but it’s not. The loss of productivity may have been caused by any number of factors. In order to prevail at this stage, you will need excellent record keeping on the job, including meeting minutes, daily reports, change orders, field notes, and the like. These documents must show when the delays occurred and clarify the cause. Additionally, you must be able to prove that the delay events were unforeseeable, beyond your control, and most importantly, caused by the owner or upstream contractor.



Damages: To prove damages, you must be able to show how the delay or inefficient work cost you more money. This calculation is not an exact science and often involves the engagement of an expert. The expert will assist in quantifying your damages based on a measured mile, earned value, comparison of bid versus actual experience or an industry study. Regardless of the methodology, the expert assists in determining the difference between your bid and the actual cost to complete the project. Often times, this will require an admission that “while we made money on the project, we didn’t make as much money as we planned.”

Conclusion

Loss of productivity is a legitimate source of damages on a construction project. The challenge will be connecting the loss of productivity to a cause that was beyond your control or expectation, and then proving your damages. If you believe that you have a loss of productivity claim, we recommend contacting a construction attorney experienced in handling these claims. ■

Craig Martin is a construction attorney with Lamson Dugan & Murray, LLP law firm in Omaha, Nebraska, and a member of the collaborative Johnson Team. The Johnson Team consists of a group of specialists serving LICA members on matters of significance – planning, protection, and preservation of their businesses and families. If you have any questions, Craig’s e-mail is cmartin@ldmlaw.com.

Preparing Job Sites for Severe Weather

By THE LICA SAFETY PORTAL, Zywave Resource Library

Severe weather conditions can be detrimental to job sites, putting unintended strain on your business. While there's no way to completely guarantee your job site is protected from the elements, there are measures that can be taken to reduce the risks posed by extreme weather events.

Securing Your Job Site

While each job site is different and requires unique planning to protect against severe weather, there are several general precautions that should be taken to protect every job site.

First, it is important to develop and educate all employees on an emergency action plan to be followed in the event of an unsafe weather condition. This plan should be as detailed as possible, easily accessible and well-practised. The plan should account for any exposures to the job site and address how to best protect the job site, its equipment and workers. Include assignments for everyone on the project or designate a few employees to lead the plan.

Secondly, it's important to monitor the weather for any incoming alerts or adverse conditions. Because extreme weather events can develop quickly, it is important to assign one

person the task of monitoring the weather throughout the day. For this, it's valuable to have a weather radio or computer on hand at all times on the job site.

Especially for larger projects, it's a good practice to keep in communication with local building officials about their plans for extreme weather. This allows you not only to coordinate plans if necessary, but also to reassure the officials that your job site poses no threat to nearby properties or residents.

As soon as a severe storm is approaching, begin working through your emergency action plan to secure, remove or protect any and all equipment that may become a flying projectile in high winds or be adversely affected by the weather. Materials and equipment to keep in mind include:

**Dumpsters, Portable bathrooms, Cranes, Fence screens
Job site signage, In-progress utility systems, Electronics
Project documents, Hazardous chemicals**

In the case of heavy rain or wind, unwelcome debris and water may find its way into your job site. To ensure quick cleanup and minimal resulting damage, set up water pumps before the storm approaches and have a plan to safely remove any additional water or debris after the storm has passed.



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Next, secure the structure itself. If necessary, board up windows, doors and other openings that may expose the interior to harmful weather elements. To prevent flooding, create a sandbag perimeter.

Once the storm has passed, it's vital to perform an evaluation of the job site before work can resume. Practise extreme caution during the inspection and identify what equipment and areas need to be addressed to get the job back on track.

Types of Weather Hazards

Extreme weather can come in many forms, each of which require their own methods of preparation in order to protect your job site. Before preparing your job site, it's important to understand the types of severe weather conditions that are most likely to affect it, which can vary based on season and location.

Possible severe weather conditions can be broken down into the following general exposures:

Strong winds—High winds can bring unwanted debris into the job site, throw equipment around and, in extreme cases, even compromise the integrity of a structure. To prepare for strong winds, store and secure loose construction materials, equipment and signage, and brace framing and anchor walls to the framework as soon as it is constructed. For any machinery, such as cranes and vehicles, follow manufacturer guidelines for

proper operation and storage, and do not operate machinery during a storm.

Heavy rain and flooding—Water is one of the most damaging elements to any job site. Job sites with incomplete drainage may become flooded, and heavy rain can damage unprotected electrical equipment. To prepare for heavy rain and flooding, create and maintain temporary drainage systems in any areas that might be especially susceptible to flooding, and do not install finished elements such as flooring and drywall until windows, doors and the roof have been installed watertight. If necessary, install temporary roofs where installation of the permanent roof may be delayed.

Winter conditions—Winter weather brings its own unique set of exposures, many of which don't require a storm to pose a threat to your job site and employees. To protect against winter conditions, have all pathways cleared of snow and ice, and apply sand or salt immediately when necessary—consider hiring a contractor to perform these duties. Additionally, require all employees to wear high-traction footwear to prevent slipping. Monitor temperatures to avoid freezing exposed water systems, and provide warming stations and hot drinks to employees to prevent hypothermia, trench foot and frostbite.

Preparing for extreme weather can prevent unnecessary workplace accidents. ■

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Campaigns/Administration/ Congress Hit Reset Button

By NICK YAKSICH, LICA Director of Government Relations

Events of the past month have caused the political world and Congress to hit the reset button. First, there was the assassination attempt on former President Trump and the unified party voice from the Republican Convention in Milwaukee. Then, President Biden announced that he will not seek reelection and endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris to lead the ticket with her VP nominee, Governor Walz. Both stunning events have turned the legislative schedule and campaigns upside down.

The impact is being felt not only at the top of the ticket but in every contested race in Congress, which will ultimately decide who controls the House and Senate. While there are still around 90 days for the campaigns to make their cases, significant legislation that will impact land improvement contractors is pending before Congress.

If Congress does not come together this year to enact a bipartisan farm bill, extend tax cuts, and reauthorize infrastructure spending, the legislative process will begin anew in the next Congress. Given the significant legislative, and possibly administrative, duties of a new Congress—including seating new leadership and committees, Senate nominations, and other essential actions during the first months of the year—there is a groundswell of support to act on these bills this year. While there is optimism that bills will be seriously considered this fall, I believe both sides will hedge their bets and wait for next year, as the election results will dramatically shape the outcome of critical legislation.

The Farm Bill

The House Agriculture Committee has approved a farm bill reauthorization that awaits House floor action. The Senate has yet to act. The Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry has jurisdiction over the U.S. Department of Agriculture's farm, conservation, and rural development programs; food stamps and nutrition; and forestry policy. The Senate Agriculture Committee Chair, Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), is not seeking reelection, so her hope of a crowning piece of legislation is slipping away. The Committee is developing its version of a farm bill to address critical issues such as:

- Extending a fair safety net and a permanent disaster assistance program for farmers
- Continuing the sugar program with additional protections against imports of subsidized foreign sugar
- Strengthening the support available for dairy farmers
- Allowing farms to meet more of our nation's energy needs
- Supporting the economic development of rural communities

Outlook: This is a must-pass bill, but the battle will be about funding. Nearly 80% of the funding goes to nutritional and food programs, so the outcome of the elections will determine how the programs are funded. Conservation funding has seen an increase

in the current administration, but the proposed House bill reduces conservation funding.

The Tax Bill

Major provisions in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 (TCJA) expire in late 2025 unless Congress extends them. If the TCJA provisions sunset, most everyone will be affected in one way or another. Tax brackets, income tax rates, child tax credit, state and local tax deductions, mortgage interest deductions, and much more will literally change overnight. At this time, pulling together a tax bill is a monumental task, but in the legislative process, I have learned to never say never.

Outlook: The election will tip the tax bill either toward a strong corporate bill or one that favors the middle class and supports expanding programs such as childcare and student education loans.

The Infrastructure Bill

In 2022, President Joe Biden signed into law one of the largest infrastructure packages in U.S. history after months of bipartisan negotiations and tense political infighting, shoring up \$1.2 trillion in funds, including \$550 billion in new investments for the nation's bridges, airports, waterways, public transit, and more.

Taken together, in the first 16 months after the bill was signed into law, states committed funds to nearly 36,400 new projects, totaling \$61.3 billion in formula and discretionary funds through January 30, 2023. These new projects stretch from coast to coast, with at least one new project underway in every congressional district.

Formula programs allow states flexibility to choose the type of work that best suits their needs. Some states are prioritizing major interstate capacity improvements, while others may bundle bridge repairs to address maintenance backlogs.

Outlook: The authority to spend infrastructure funding expires next year, so Congress must act on a new infrastructure bill. Many Members of Congress, and lobbyists, will be saying, "Didn't we just do that?" Estimates are that only 20% of the funding from the 2022 Act has been spent, so the challenge will be convincing elected officials that action needs to be taken. It is often said in Washington that every week appears to be "Infrastructure Week," so the talk will continue, and the programs will be extended at or near current levels.

Policy Matters

Despite the tumultuous times our nation faces, there should be optimism that farm, tax, and infrastructure bills are at the forefront of the congressional agenda once the November elections are over. In your conversations and letters to your elected officials, keep stressing the importance of these issues to your business and to every American. Good policy should drive good politics. ■

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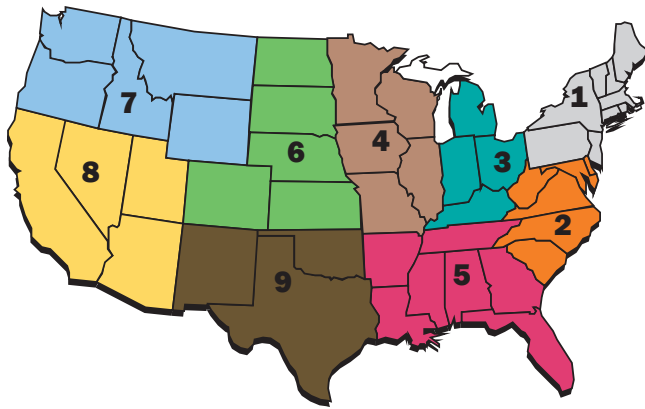
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