

MLICA Scoop

LAND IMPROVEMENT CONTRACTORS ~ MICHIGAN CHAPTER

2024 ISSUE 1

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From the Lead Plow, Russ Talaski, President MLICA

Welcome to Spring in Michigan! This has been the driest spring I can remember in my 29 years in business. With the unusual weather, it seems there's less time for our usual activities, such as spending time with family or planning other aspects of our business.

At our Annual Meeting, we discussed the tax relief opportunities provided by our MILICA organization. Firstly, we successfully passed a bill in Michigan with the assistance of Scott Everett. This bill exempts equipment used for farm drainage from personal property tax. Such equipment includes computers, tile plows, backhoes, excavators, and any other equipment directly involved in the farm drainage process. However, vehicles with license plates, such as pickups, trucks, and trailers, are not included in this exemption. If your business involves a combination of farm drainage and commercial or residential work, it's advisable to

contact your Township Supervisor to determine the proportion of personal property tax based on the percentage of each type of work.

Secondly, Scott Everett ensured that the word "DRAINAGE" was added to the definition of agricultural tax exemptions in Michigan. This simple addition makes us eligible for tax exemptions on sales tax for red-dyed fuel, drainage equipment, parts for such equipment, and supporting equipment. Again, this exemption does not apply to licensed vehicles like trucks, trailers, and pickups, nor to the parts required to maintain them. I recommend setting up a tax list with your parts department to ensure they inquire whether a purchase is taxable or non-taxable.

Wishing you all a successful and safe spring season. Enjoy the weather!

Sincerely,

Russ Talaski
MILICA President



FEATURES

DIARY OF AN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

CONVENTION HIGHLIGHTS | WHY LICA

NATIONAL HAPPENINGS: LICA WATER MANAGEMENT FORUM IN RENSSELAER, IN

OLD TIMER'S PERSPECTIVE: "BID" MEANS BADLY INSTALLED DRAINAGE

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FARM SAFE 

Diary of an Executive Director

As I look back on the past few months, it's been quite a ride filled with highs, lows, and unexpected twists.

In January, we kicked off the year with our Winter Convention and Annual Meeting. It was refreshing to see everyone gather at a new location and embrace the changes we implemented, including a revamped schedule format that received positive feedback all around.

February brought us to the National LICA Winter Convention in Virginia Beach. Despite the picturesque setting, the weather reminded us of home with chilly temperatures. Nonetheless, we rallied together for a polar plunge into the Atlantic Ocean, all in the name of raising funds for the LICA Veterans Foundation. Let's just say swimming in Lake Superior in the summer is nothing like taking a dip in the icy ocean, especially with the wind howling at 20mph!

At the end of February was the opportunity to attend the 2024 Drainage Workshop hosted by Ehsan Ghane of MSU Extension in partnership with Michigan LICA. It was an

informative session where attendees gained insights into contemporary drainage design and learned about maximizing profits with user-friendly tools. Plus, the chance to join Michigan LICA was presented, adding another dimension to our professional network.

March, however, brought its own set of challenges, particularly in the realm of technology. One morning, my computer decided to call it quits, refusing to turn on. Despite attempts to troubleshoot, it was off to the repair shop. Dealing with a faulty battery turned into a waiting game, thanks to hazardous material shipping regulations. Finally getting my computer back was a relief, until it decided to act up again the next morning. Now, I'm navigating a temporary fix while hoping for a permanent solution from the repair shop.

As we bid farewell to winter and welcome spring, I'm reminded of the resilience required to navigate life's ups and downs. Despite the setbacks, I'm grateful for the moments of connection, laughter, and learning shared with colleagues and friends. Here's to smoother sailing ahead as we embrace the new season with optimism and determination.

UPCOMING EVENTS

NATIONAL LICA WATER MANAGEMENT FORUM

ST. JOSEPH'S COLLEGE | RENSSELAER, IN

June 13 & 14, 2024

LICA FOCUS AUCTION BY BIGIRON

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June 26th

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MLICA Convention Highlights

MLICA MEMBERS & ASSOCIATES BUILDING COMRADERY WHILE FUELING UP WITH A TASTY LUNCH AT THE MLICA 2024 WINTER CONVENTION.



ABOVE: DAVID LEONARD WITH ERIN BALLOR OF RYZOME INVESTMENTS PRESENTING ON UNDERSTANDING BUSINESS FINANCIALS & SUCCESSION

BELOW: TO MEMBERS AT THE MLICA 2024 WINTER CONVENTION WHO GAINED VALUABLE INSIGHTS ON FINANCIAL STRATEGIES & SUCCESSION PLANNING FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS



MLICA MEMBERS ATTENDING AN EDUCATIONAL SESSION AT THE MLICA 2024 WINTER CONVENTION.



National LICA Highlights



ABOVE: FROM TRICORN HATS TO CORSETED GOWNS, THIS GROUP BROUGHT THE SPIRIT OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION ALIVE AT THE NATIONAL LICA WINTER CONVENTION IN VIRGINIA BEACH! WHO NEEDS A TIME MACHINE WHEN YOU HAVE SUCH EXQUISITE COSTUMES?

BELOW: A SNAPSHOT OF SHARED LAUGHTER AND BONDING AT THE BANQUET, AS THE COOK FAMILY AND REPRESENTATIVES FROM ADS & BRON JOIN FORCES FOR A MEMORABLE PHOTO OP.



BESIDE THE ROARING OCEAN, WE FOUND OUR STRENGTH. TOGETHER, WE RAISED OVER \$5,000 FOR THE LICA VETERANS FOUNDATION. LET THE WAVES OF GENEROSITY KEEP FLOWING!



Why LICA?

I joined LICA to learn more about the trade early in my career. I remained as an active member because of the camaraderie and friendships that I have made over the years.

~Will Word, MLICA Board Member

I joined LICA after attending conventions and meetings with my uncle. I've continued to be a member for the friendships and knowledge learned from fellow contractors.

~ Trevor Young, MLICA Member

Will Word said I HAD to join. Really though, I joined because Will convinced me that I would learn a lot. I have stayed because of the relationships I have built, especially with Russ Talaski and Mike Cook. LICA has done a lot for me in being able to call other members and ask questions and solve problems.

~Dave Franks, MLICA Member

I joined LICA when I started my business in 1987 because it had been a family tradition as long as I could remember. I have continued because of meeting other contractors around the country, sharing ideas, as well as, the respect & comradery which are invaluable to me. I also firmly believe in LICA's mission to protect God's earth.

~Mike Cook, MLICA Member

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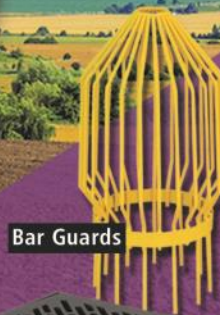
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SAINT JOSEPH'S COLLEGE

St. Joseph's College campus, conveniently located near I-65 midway between Indianapolis and Chicago, offers a picturesque setting for the LICA Water Management Forum. The campus features a 10-acre Training Field for outdoor demonstrations and displays, adjacent to the attractive Lake Banet and campus apartments. The Core Education Center, equipped with multimedia capabilities and high-speed internet, serves as a hub for education and indoor displays.



St. Joseph's Campus



Core Education Center Foyer
- Indoor Exhibits



Courtney Auditorium - Inside
the Core Education Center

The Courtney Auditorium, situated within the Core Education Center, is the perfect venue for education and training. With multimedia amenities and seating for 80 people, this auditorium ensures a dynamic and engaging experience for all participants.

The Core Education Center Foyer, directly outside the auditorium, offers a spacious and inviting atmosphere with floor-to-ceiling windows. This area is ideal for indoor exhibitors, providing ample space for networking and showcasing products. Each exhibitor will be provided with an 8-foot table and two chairs. Attendees will naturally flow through the foyer before and after education sessions, offering exhibitors valuable visibility.

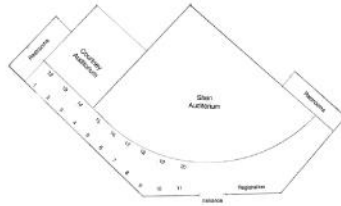
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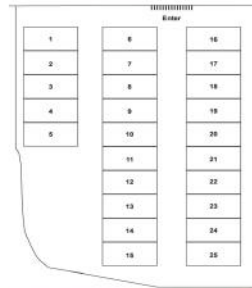
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INDOOR FLOOR PLAN



OUTDOOR FLOOR PLAN



Outdoor Exhibit Location - 10.03 acre training grounds
and Residential apartments on the right.

NATIONAL HAPPENINGS

LICA WATER MANAGEMENT FORUM

JUNE 13 & 14, 2024 IN RENSSELAER, IN

Water management professionals will unite at the LICA Water Management Forum—an exclusive platform bringing together contractors, farmers, government officials, the education community, and other industry leaders in water management solutions. The two-day event will overflow with opportunities for education, demonstration, networking, sponsorship, and exhibition.

St. Joseph's College campus, conveniently located near I-65 midway between Indianapolis and Chicago, offers a picturesque setting for the LICA Water Management Forum. The campus features a 10-acre Training Field for outdoor demonstrations and displays, adjacent to the attractive Lake Banet and campus apartments. The Core Education Center, equipped with multimedia capabilities and high-speed internet, serves as a hub for education and indoor displays.

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OLD TIMER'S PERSPECTIVE: "BID" MEANS BADLY INSTALLED DRAINAGE

SUBMITTED BY MIKE COOK

Fellow MLICA Contractors:

Over the years I've had discussions with many of you concerning competitors "cutting prices" in quotes to farmers who ask for a "bid" to drain a field. Yes, lowball quotes are frustrating, but, as a fellow professional, I'd like to share my approach to handling a bid request from a customer.

Let's envision a scenario: a farmer seeks a bid for tiling a 40-acre field with minimal grading, spaced every 30 feet. In my estimates, I consistently quote \$50 higher per acre than the competition. However, it's important to clarify with the customer from the outset that what I provide is an **estimate**, not a bid. Why? Because I define "bid" as **BADLY INSTALLED DRAINAGE** since it often implies compromises in quality, favoring the cheapest option over lasting effectiveness.

Mr Farmer, consider this: I could easily reduce costs upfront by downsizing mains from 10 inches, 8 inches, and 6 inches to just 8 inches and 6 inches, saving \$700. Nice savings, but you'll regret when the mains cannot carry enough when we get a large rain 2 days in a row and water ponds. Ponded water on your crop has been proven to reduce yield anywhere from 5 to 50%. Let's assume 150 bushel corn per acre at a low price of \$4; a minor 5% loss will cost you 7.5 bushel per acre for 40 acres equaling 300 bushels total. At \$4 a bushel that would equal \$1200 in only one year. We know all too well the consequences when inadequate drainage fails to manage heavy rainfall, resulting in flooded crops and diminished yields. It's not merely about immediate savings but safeguarding the long-term investment.

Beware of costs not included in a bid. While some contractors may omit certain expenses to make their bids appear more appealing, I prefer to include all necessary components like move in costs and connections upfront, ensuring there are no surprises down the line. My aim is always to deliver a final bill that's not only accurate but also lower than initially estimated.

And let's not forget about headers. Research indicates that the last segment of a lateral line often underperforms. I've seen

Editor's Note:

Just the other day, while I was in conversation with Mike, he mentioned how he defines "BID" as Badly Installed Drainage, and it caught my attention. I thought it would be a great article to share some of his "old timer's" perspective that he has gained as time has passed. While he doesn't utilize this with every customer, it has helped him in his business over the years. I have confidence that all of you will benefit from Mike's perspective.

work that stops short 15' of the field edge or header. 43 lines x 15 ft = 750' which would save \$450. While skipping this component might yield a \$450 savings, it's a compromise I refuse to make, prioritizing quality and effectiveness above all else.

As professionals affiliated with MLICA, we're committed to continuous improvement and adherence to industry standards. It's imperative that our customers remain informed, including completing the requisite 1026 form with Farm Service to preempt any potential regulatory issues.

In conclusion, while the term "bid" is best used for government, development projects, etc. where engineered quantities and specs are closely watched, in our line of work, we must prioritize quality and integrity above all else. I remind my employees regularly "if you can't get something just right, let us know & we'll all make it right; a buried mistake will only hurt our reputation." Our reputation hinges on our ability to deliver excellence, and any mistakes must be rectified promptly to uphold our standards. Let's continue striving for excellence in all that we do.

Mike Cook

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Deepfakes Explained

Deepfakes refer to sophisticated forgeries of an image, video or audio recording. Deepfakes have been around for years—you can even find a version of them in social media applications. For instance, with Snapchat, face-changing filters take real-time data and feed it through an algorithm to produce a synthetic image.

However, as the technology has evolved, deepfakes are now able to alter media so well that it's often difficult to detect that any manipulation has occurred at all. Through the use of artificial intelligence (AI) technology, deepfakes leverage existing audio and video of an individual—all while continuously learning how to produce a more convincing forgery.

Deepfakes have been used to believably impersonate influential political figures. They can even be used to alter both real-time or recorded media. Deepfakes are so sophisticated that they can deceive the general public into thinking a person has said or done something they normally wouldn't. And, in the hands of a malicious party, deepfakes can be incredibly devastating.

The Risk of Deepfakes for Businesses

Through the use of phishing and “fake president” scams, cybercriminals have long tried to deceive businesses into giving up sensitive information. Often, these scams are executed using fraudulent email accounts, which, in some cases, can be easy to spot. However, using deepfakes, cybercriminals now have the power to fool even the most careful and perceptive organizations.

With deepfakes, cybercriminals can make a person in a video look and sound like a target company's CEO, tricking employees into wiring money or sharing sensitive data, among other compromising actions. Specifically, deepfakes can be used to execute social engineering scams or sway public opinion:

- **Using deepfakes in social engineering scams**—Put simply, social engineering is when a malicious party takes advantage of human behavior to commit a crime. Social engineers can gain access to buildings, computer systems and data simply by exploiting the weakest link in a security system: humans. For example, social engineers could steal sensitive documents or place key loggers on employees' computers at a bank—all while posing as fire inspectors from a nearby fire department. Social engineers don't need to have expert knowledge of a company's computer network to break into a business—all it takes is for one employee to give out a password or allow the

social engineers access to an area they shouldn't be in. And because deepfake technology has become less expensive and more accessible, the prospect of tricking an employee to perform a malicious action through social engineering tactics is that much easier. This is especially true given how realistic deepfakes can be.

- **Using deepfakes to sway public opinion**—By deepfaking a company's CEO or figureheads, a malicious party can easily spread false or potentially damaging information. Through deepfakes, criminals can make key stakeholders say or do just about anything. They could have a CEO share false information, say or do socially unacceptable things or attempt to influence consumer behavior. All of these actions can harm a business's reputation, sometimes irreparably.

Given the potential harm of deepfakes, it's crucial that businesses are prepared to protect themselves.

Guarding Against Deepfakes

When it comes to protecting your business from deepfake schemes, consider:

- **Training employees**—To protect your organization against deepfakes, employee training is critical. Employees should be educated on deepfakes, including what they are and how they may be used against the business. Simply by raising awareness of deepfakes, employees will be better equipped to spot them, allowing your business to respond quickly and swiftly.
- **Utilizing detection software**—While AI is used to make deepfakes better and more effective, it can also be used to help detect potential deepfakes. In fact, large corporations such as Facebook and Microsoft use AI and similar software to detect and remove deepfake videos from their platforms. When it comes to deepfakes, the earlier you detect one, the better. This allows you to act quickly to reduce potential harm.
- **Establishing a response strategy**—If and when your organization is the target of a deepfake-driven attack, it's crucial to have a response strategy in place. Such a strategy should center around crises mitigation. This includes outlining individual responsibilities, determining escalation practices and communicating response best practices.

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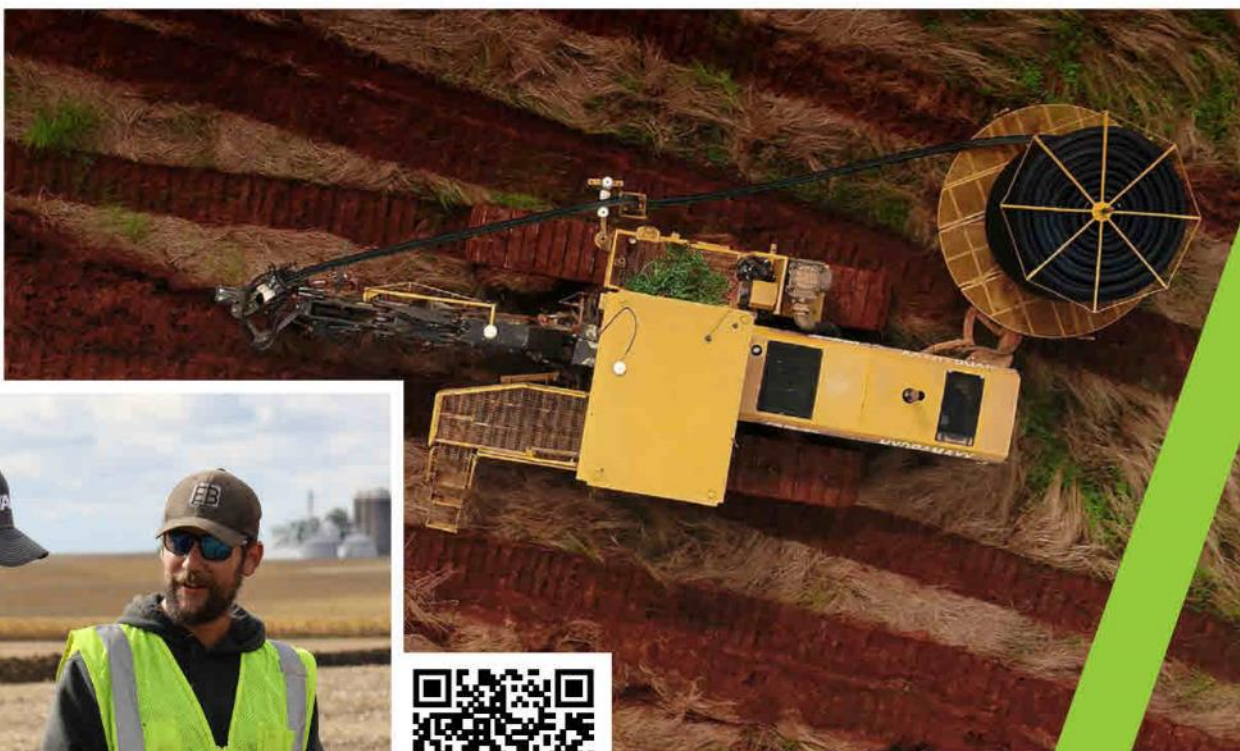
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Small Business Bulletin

Cybersecurity Best Practices

Cyberattacks are becoming more frequent and complex, and businesses of all sizes and industries are potential targets. In fact, cybercriminals increasingly go after small businesses since they contain much of the same types of sensitive information as larger enterprises but often have weaker cybersecurity defenses. Verizon's 2023 Data Breach Investigations Report found that 43% of all cyberattacks target small businesses, and 60% of those victims go out of business within six months of the attack.

Even if a small business survives a cyberattack, there can still be devastating consequences, such as high costs, reputational damage and unanticipated downtime. To best combat these risks, it is important for small business owners to be aware of common cyberthreats they may face, including:

- **Phishing**—Phishing is a type of cyberattack that utilizes deceptive emails or other electronic communication to manipulate recipients into sharing sensitive information, clicking on malicious links or opening harmful attachments. Emails are the most common delivery method for phishing attempts, but cybercriminals may also use text messages, social media messages, fake or misleading websites, voicemails or even live phone calls.
- **Business email compromise (BEC)**—A BEC scam entails a cybercriminal impersonating a seemingly legitimate source—such as a senior-level employee, supplier, vendor, business partner or other organization—via email. The cybercriminal uses these emails to gain the trust of their target and trick them into wiring money, sharing sensitive information or engaging in other compromising activities.
- **Malware**—Malware is a general term that describes viruses, worms, Trojan horses, spyware, adware, rootkits and other unwanted software or programs. Once a malware program has gained access to a

device, it can disrupt normal computing operations, collect information and control system resources.

- **Insider threats**—Workers who have access to sensitive information, including contractors with access to the company's network, may be aware of existing security weaknesses and can exploit them more easily than outsiders.
- **Password attacks**—Using weak or easily guessed passwords or using the same password for multiple accounts can result in compromised data.

To limit the risk of cyberattacks, small business owners should implement the following cybersecurity best practices:

- **Employee education**—Workforce cybersecurity education is essential to teach employees to identify phishing attacks, social engineering and other cyberthreats.
- **Security software**—A network firewall can prevent unauthorized users from accessing company websites, email servers and other sources of information accessed through the internet.
- **Multifactor authentication (MFA)**—Important accounts, including email, social media and banking apps, should require MFA to limit the opportunity for cybercriminals to steal data.
- **Data backups**—Essential files should be backed up in a separate location, such as on an external hard drive or in the cloud.

As cyberthreats become more frequent and severe, small businesses should take protective measures to secure all company, personal and financial information.



Common Employee Communication Mistakes to Avoid

Effective communication is crucial to fostering a positive relationship between employers and employees. It can show employees they're valued and heard, improving employee satisfaction and retention. Conversely, poor communication can lead to workplace inefficiencies, foster employee discontent, and create engagement and retention issues. These concerns can significantly impact workplace productivity and organizational revenue; according to a 2022 study by Grammarly and the Harris Poll, organizations lose about \$1.2 trillion yearly due to ineffective communication. For small businesses, even a marginal decrease in productivity or revenue can be devastating.

To combat the consequences of poor communication, this article provides an overview of common employee communication mistakes and discusses how small businesses can avoid them.

Benefits of Effective Communication

The purpose of employee communication is to keep employees informed. This is important at all levels, including groundbreaking business information as well as day-to-day interactions. Organizations that effectively communicate with employees may experience the following benefits:

- Increased productivity
- Improved retention
- Greater employee engagement
- Improved workplace safety and crisis management
- Better success rates for change initiatives
- Increased efficiency
- Improved collaboration
- Increased knowledge-sharing and innovation

Common Employee Communication Mistakes

Despite the significant role employee communication plays in creating successful and efficient workplaces, research indicates that many employers still struggle to convey

important information to workers effectively. A 2022 report by Gallup found that just 7% of U.S. workers strongly agree that communication at their organizations is accurate, timely and open. This can significantly impact company culture, employee morale and performance. Employers can make several common mistakes when it comes to employee communication, including:

- Providing infrequent and inconsistent communication
- Failing to understand the employee audience
- Providing irrelevant and impersonal information
- Lacking a clear internal communication strategy
- Not asking for employee feedback
- Using the wrong communication channels
- Overloading employees with information
- Not measuring the effectiveness of internal communications

Improving Employee Communication

There are many ways for employers to connect with employees to enhance engagement, productivity and profitability. The most effective communication strategy is tailored to align with an organization's and its employees' unique goals and needs. Small businesses can consider the following guidance for effective communication with employees:

- Identify the goal of the communication.
- Understand the audience.
- Tailor messaging to the audience and objective.
- Create avenues for employee feedback or questions.
- Measure performance of the communication strategies.

Conclusion

Employee communication can significantly impact employer-employee relationships. Small businesses should consider how these tips can apply to the structure of their organizations. Employers who enable better communication among employees may notice improvements to their bottom lines.

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- NPDES/SWPPP Storm Water Compliance and Permitting
- Open Channel Drain Design
- Permitting Assistance
- Retention / Detention Basin Design
- River / Stream Analysis
- Site Plan Reviews & Storm Water Management Plans
- Soil Erosion & Sedimentation Control Plans
- Soil Erosion Inspections and Permitting
- Storm Water Management Plans
- Storm Water Quality Studies and Flow Monitoring Programs
- Storm Water Runoff Modeling
- Stream Restoration
- Surface Water
- Underground Information Design
- Utility and Project Coordination
- Water Quality Management
- Water Resource Planning
- Watershed Restoration

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The MLICA Scoop is the official publication of the Michigan Land Improvement Contractors Association, dedicated to the professional conservation of soil and water.

The MLICA Scoop welcomes letters, subject to editing for accuracy and brevity. The MLICA Scoop also welcomes articles relevant to the land improvement industry. All letters and articles can be emailed to scook@michiganlica.org. Please include your name and phone number for verification purposes.

