

# MLICA Scoop

LAND IMPROVEMENT CONTRACTORS ~ MICHIGAN CHAPTER

2023 ISSUE 2

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## From the Lead Plow, Russ Talaski, President MLICA

I have just one word for this spring, WOW! It started out dry and things were happening. Farmers in the area were planting corn and soybeans about 3 weeks earlier than I can ever remember. Then it rained with no sun or wind for about 3 weeks. Then it finally dried out to plant and the race was on. Michigan May (May be rain, May be sunny and 80, May be dry for weeks.) An old farmer told me in April that the weather was the same as in 1988 and that year we had a very dry summer and a wet fall.

On May 23 the Miss Dig 811 Board of Directors implemented a new size requirement for work of Scope and discontinued the 21-day work ticket. This would only allow a 50,000 square foot area to a work ticket in rural areas. This meant that we would have to have 35 tickets to mark a 40-acre field to

tile. I talked to a few board members, then called Eric Urbain (a longtime MLICA friend) from Miss Dig and he explained what it meant and would work on it if he could. On June 1, 2023, we received an email from Eric explaining that farm activity and tile drainage, for now, should use a 180-day PROJECT; make sure to use a 180-day PROJECT, not just a 180-day TICKET. Scott Everett has looked into it also, working to draft a letter from MLICA addressed to the MISS DIG Board of Directors, but it's not ready yet.

On a more positive note, the planning for the 2023 Drainage Field Day for August 8 and 9 is coming along great! We have a good committee working out the details, so spread the word and come out to help.

President Russ Talaski



### FEATURES

**FIELD DAY FLYER | DIARY OF AN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

**KEEPING UP WITH TECHNOLOGY**

**NATIONAL HAPPENINGS: ADAM COOK: CARRYING ON THE FAMILY LEGACY**

**MEMBER HIGHLIGHT: ADAM AUERNHAMER | AUERNHAMER TRENCHING**

**MEMBER HIGHLIGHT: WILL WORD | WORD CONSTRUCTION**

**MISS DIG 811 TICKET CHANGES**

**PLAYING IT SAFE: SUMMER SAFETY—DEHYDRATION**

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**2023**

# FARM DRAINAGE FIELD DAY

Hosted by Michigan Land Improvement Contractors Association

**SAVE THE DATE!**  
**August 8 & 9**

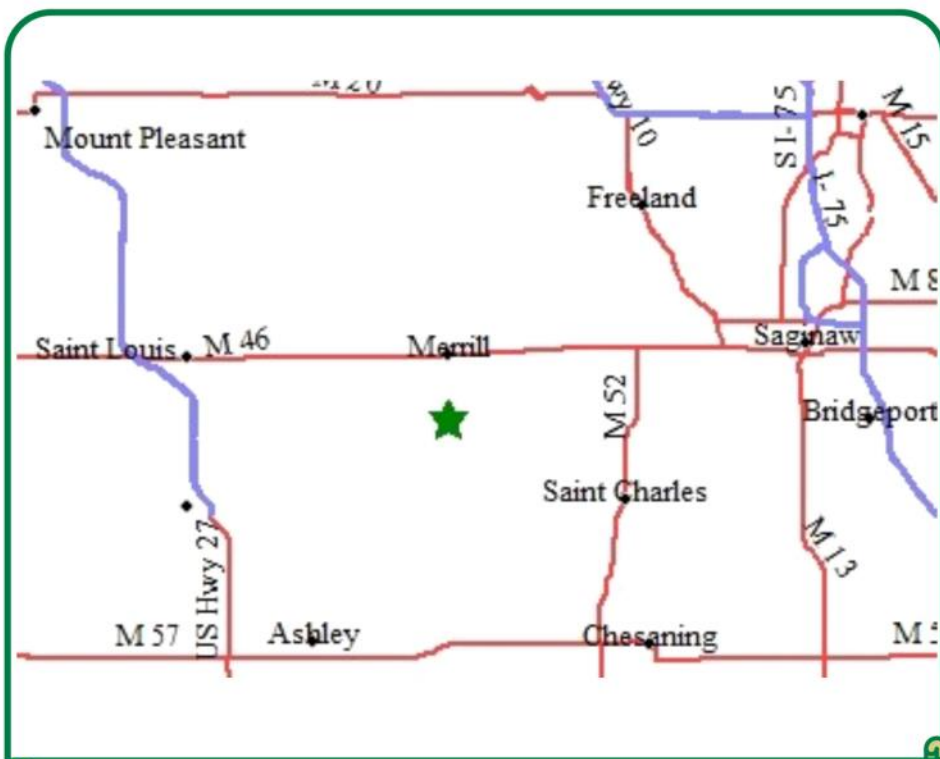
This Event is

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To Attend!

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The *Michigan Land Improvement Contractors Association* will be demonstrating best practices in retro-fitting existing agricultural drainage, saturated buffer installation, and demonstrating the use of ground penetrating radar.

Exhibitors will be on-hand to display equipment and supplies relating to the drainage and excavating industry.

Lunch will be available for purchase.

**Register online at**  
**[michiganlica.org/register](https://michiganlica.org/register)**

Pending MSU approval MSU Extension will help secure speakers and guests to help create a great educational experience for attendees.

For more information contact :  
Sarah Cook at [scook@michiganlica.org](mailto:scook@michiganlica.org)

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## Diary of an Executive Director

*Spring sure has been a crazy season, weather-wise, as well as schedule-wise! So many of my daughter's friends and teammates participate in more than one extracurricular activity at a time, so for the first time ever, I allowed Morgan to participate in more than one activity. It was quite an adjustment for the three of us keeping up with the schedule of daily track practices after school, weekly track meets, twice weekly soccer practices, soccer games on weekends, 4-H archery practice, as well as finding time to practice her violin for orchestra. Let's just say, I'm glad we've made it to June, not that things are going to slow down any! At least we're done with track and soccer for the season.*

*As you can see from the flyer on the previous page, Michigan LICA is*

*planning a field day Tuesday, August 8th and Wednesday, August 9th this year. Our last field day took place in 2020, so Board Members thought it was time to host another one. This field day will be located up in Merrill, between Alma and Saginaw. We will showcase retro-fitting an existing grid tile system, as well as installation of a saturated buffer. New equipment and technology will also be on display. The Field Day Committee will be finalizing details in the coming weeks, so stay tuned to your email and mailbox for more information.*

*Remember to stay hydrated in the hot dry weather! Hope to see you all in August at the field day!*

### UPCOMING EVENTS

**2023 NATIONAL SUMMER MEETING**  
The Graduate Hotel  
141 N. 9th St., Lincoln, NE 68508  
**July 11 - 15, 2023**

**MLICA 2023 FIELD DAY**  
4001 S. Merrill Road  
Merrill, MI 48637  
**AUGUST 8-9, 2023**

**MLICA 2024 WINTER CONVENTION  
& ANNUAL MEETING**  
Okemos Event Center  
**January 8-9, 2024**

**2024 NATIONAL WINTER CONVENTION**  
Virginia Beach, Virginia  
**February 13 - 17, 2024**



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As a contractor in the agricultural drainage industry, I know that time is money. That's why I'm always looking for new technology that can save time without breaking the bank. In March, I attended ConExpo and encountered a technology that caught my interest: Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR).

Ground-penetrating radar is a technology that has been gaining popularity in the agricultural drainage industry for its ability to locate buried pipes and drains, assess their condition, and identify potential issues without the need for invasive techniques quickly and accurately.

I've been watching GPR technology for many years, hoping it would become refined and affordable enough to use in my business. After hearing about some fellow contractors in Michigan who have successfully implemented GPR into their business, I decided to give it a try.

This spring, I had a GPR salesman come to my jobsite for a demonstration. We were working with heavy, tight clay soil, which is known to be one of the toughest types of soil to locate using GPR. To make matters worse, we had received about .2" of rain the day before, making the surface nice and sticky.

Despite these challenges, the salesman pushed the GPR unit, which is the size of a lawn mower, around the field. We had an aerial map of some old tile that showed up, and we located over those and tried it over a deep 8" clay tile as well. While it had trouble seeing the deep main, it did pick up several lines in the field. Later, we went back to dig up one of the marks, and it was right on. Granted, it was a shallow clay tile, but it wasn't on the map, and we just randomly discovered it while pushing the unit across the field. (See picture to the right.)



While GPR technology may be cost-prohibitive for just locating random tile lines, imagine if you had to go into

a previously tiled field to split laterals with no map. Compared to digging and using a tile locator or probe, the GPR unit will be much faster, require less labor, and create less disturbance to the field.

Another possible use for GPR technology would be to contract out to solar or wind companies that are crossing intensively tiled farms. If you could provide a map or possibly get the contract to re-route drainage systems ahead of the utilities, you might open a new opportunity for your company.

As contractors, we need to keep up with the latest technology to stay competitive and provide the best possible service to our clients. GPR technology may be the next big thing in the agricultural drainage industry, and I'm excited to see how it can help my business and my clients in the future.

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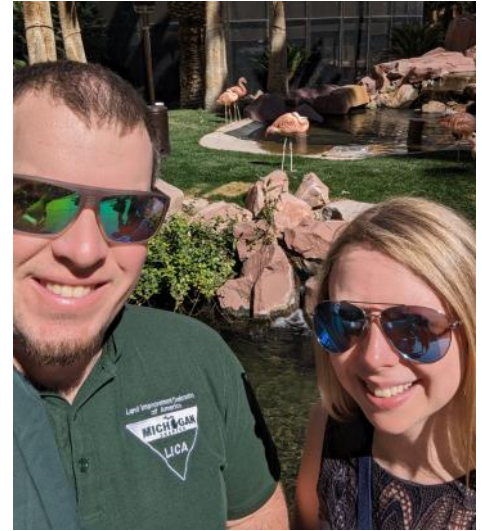
## ADAM COOK: CARRYING ON THE FAMILY LEGACY AS THIRD-GENERATION REGION III VP FOR LICA

At the National LICA Convention held in Las Vegas this March, my brother Adam Cook was elected as the Region III VP. This achievement is significant not only for Adam personally, but also for our family, as he becomes the first third generation to hold a national position within LICA.

Our family's deep-rooted association with LICA spans multiple generations, with our grandpa John and dad Mike both having served as National LICA Presidents. Their dedication has made the Cook family well-known and respected within the organization. Now, as Adam assumes the role of Region III VP, he not only carries on our family's legacy but also represents the interests of LICA members in Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, and Kentucky.

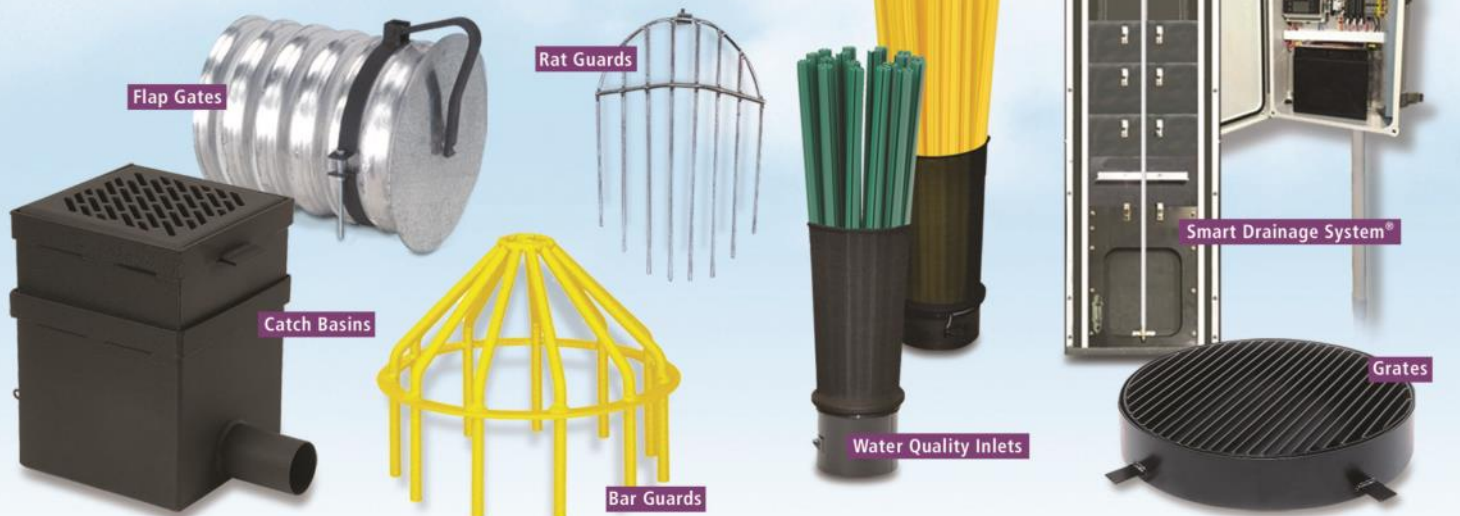
Adam's election as Region III VP comes with increased responsibilities and travel commitments. As he

represents the diverse needs of LICA members in the region, he will be traveling more frequently. I understand that this decision wasn't taken lightly, especially considering Adam's son and daughter are still in elementary school, in addition to taking more responsibilities of the daily operations of the tiling business. However, his passion for the land improvement industry and his commitment to serving LICA members ultimately propelled him to take on this role despite the challenges.



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## MEMBER HIGHLIGHT: ADAM AUERNHAMER | AUERNHAMER TRENCHING

Adam represents the fourth generation of Auernhamer Trenching, a farm drainage business, where he services clients within a 50-mile radius around Frankenmuth, MI.



In 1948, Auernhamer Trenching began with the purchase of a Buckeye 301 by Adam's grandfather Ruben Auernhamer and great-grandfather father, Carl. Thirty years later, in 1978, Adam's father, Dave, teamed with Ruben, incorporating the business with available family members on the work crew. At a young age, Adam took interest and began learning the ins and outs of the farm drainage business. Attending State and National LICA events as a youngster connected Adam with peers, innovations, equipment, products, and rhetoric used in drainage business. During his formative school years, Adam was involved with all aspects of the tiling crew, including connection hookups, surveying, backhoe, and plow operation.

Adam attended college at Michigan State University, Concordia Chicago University, and finalized his schooling at Central Michigan University where he obtained a Bachelors in Construction Management and Business Administration. Adam diversified his experience by working with a local builder and as a project manager for a building and restoration company before returning to the family business. In 2014, Adam joined the business full time and has since acquired ownership and management responsibilities. He manages a crew of two full time employees, along with several on call helpers drawn from the ranks of friends, relatives, and fresh retirees.

Today, a Bron 550 serves as the mainstay in the tiling operation with support from John Deere backhoes, and required tile handling trailers. An onboard reel and 15"



power fed installation has expanded the offerings of services. GPS and technological improvements are the newest advancements to provide quality services to the clients.

Kalie, Adam's wife since August of 2020, is learning and supports the lifestyle and challenges of a business steered by agricultural fluctuations and seasonal weather variance. Together they enjoy time with friends and family, snowy winter walks with their two dogs in the woods, and weekends in northern Michigan at the lake. Adam plays fastpitch softball, officiates high school football, and enjoys hunting waterfowl and upland game to occupy his free time. Ushering for worship services, and a member of the church physical properties trustee committee occupy some of Adam's volunteer time.

Learning from experiences and advice of others is an often overlooked and assumed blessing. Through the decades of existence, LICA has presented opportunity to conduit information, events, and experiences which sustain drainage concepts. Immersing oneself in the wealth of experience and gleaned knowledge from like-minded contractors, should properly route stewardship of land and water for future generations. All these anticipated qualities, framed in the presence of wholesome fellowship, should be the vision and mission of organizations like LICA.

## MEMBER HIGHLIGHT: WILL WORD | WORD CONSTRUCTION, INC.

**Member Name:** Will Word

**Company Name:** Word Construction, Inc.

**When did you start/how long have you been in the industry?**

I purchased the business from my father in 1991.

**How did you get into the business?**

After graduating high school, I went to Australia on the Future Farmers of America "Work Exchange Abroad" program, where I spent 6 months living and working on two different dairy farms. I then spent 2 months traveling around Australia before returning home to help with the family business when my father, Bill was elected as the new county drain commissioner.

**Why did you join MLICA? When did you join?**

I joined around 1995. I was looking for any and all information about drainage. The first year I joined, I purchased some GPS mapping software from Ben Foster, and I had Holdwick Manufacturing build me an on-board reel for the dozer plow I had just acquired from Ontario. Those two contacts alone, from that first annual LICA meeting propelled my business to the next level. Not to mention all the information and friendships that started that year. Being a new member and not knowing anyone, I was amazed at the camaraderie and willingness to help that came from this group of contractors.

**What are some highlights/proud points for your business?**

As anyone in the business knows, it's not as easy as it looks. Starting out, I had a Hoes 684 trencher and a backhoe. In my part of the state all we have are hills and rocks. Not ideal for a chain trencher, but I soldiered on.



I remember meeting Robert Hall at a LICO (Ontario) meeting and thinking "I'll never have one of those fancy self-propelled machines", but after a few years of running a dozer plow and building up the business I bought a 350 Bron Plow with GPS from Mike Cook. I jumped from a dozer plow with laser to a self-propelled plow with RTK GPS all at once. Now we are running a Bron 550 and have over the years kept upgrading the rest of the equipment.

My greatest achievement so far has been installing a million feet in one year. This has always been a goal of mine but is extremely hard to do in Hillsdale County. Most jobs are small and the laterals average 300 feet at times. We don't always have summer work because not too many farmers will plant wheat in my area. Then, in 2022 everything worked in our favor. Thanks to some large jobs, a full crew and the ability to work all summer, we hit the million-foot mark in late December! We made sure to take a photo on the momentous occasion.



**Tell me a little bit about your family.**

Melissa and I have been married for 32 years. I'm lucky to have a wife who puts up with the long hours and constant ups and downs of owning a business. She has been a rock (the good kind) in my life. In the early days, she even helped in the field. We have a son, Logan, who is currently attending



Michigan Technological University in the field of forestry management. This summer he is working for the Michigan DNR eradicating invasive species in the state



## MEMBER HIGHLIGHT: WILL WORD | WORD CONSTRUCTION, INC.

park forests along Lake Michigan.

### **What equipment do you run? Tell me a little about your operation.**

We currently have a Bron 550 Plow and a Cat Challenger track-tractor with a Bron 400 plow, along with all the support equipment of all colors to keep things moving along.

### **What community activities are you involved in?**

Over the years I have been involved in Jaycees, City Council and Boy Scouts. When Logan joined Scouts, I made it a priority to go along on the campouts and hiking adventures with him and the rest of the Troop. I knew that work would always be there on Monday waiting for me. He achieved the Eagle Scout rank and we are very proud of that accomplishment.

### **Fond/funny memories?**

Most of the memories that seem to stick with you are the struggles. I can drive by a field and show you where we got stuck going through a deep cut that happened 25

years ago. Sometimes I look back and wonder how I kept going, but at the time failure was not an option. Farm drainage is a definitely a profession that you have to love doing for sure.

### **Advice/words of wisdom for those just getting started?**

Learn from the experienced contactors. Attend as many trainings and workshops as possible. There is a lot of opportunity to learn. Stay up to date with technology. Work smarter, not harder. And most of all, quality over quantity. Do good work and you will always have work to do. Take the time to attend LICA meetings and field days. Even some National meetings. You'd be surprised by the contacts you will make that will pay off in the future.



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# MISS DIG 811 TICKET CHANGES

## A NOTE FROM ERIC URBAIN, MISS DIG MLICA LIASON

As many of you experienced, MISS DIG implemented a couple of changes to the ticket creation process May 23 that likely impacted your operations in a negative manner.

We understand the hardship the changes may have caused, and have implemented a policy that, in the short-term, may reduced their impact.

For farming activity, including the installation of drainage tile, we will permit the use of **180-day project** tickets. While many of your projects will likely be wrapped up far ahead of any 180 day deadline, these tickets allow for a much larger scope of work than other ticket types, and should reduce the need for multiple tickets for a single ticket.

You can find a list of webinars that can help better explain the changes and how to navigate them, as well as chart of current available ticket types and their respective scope limitations by going to our reference page at <https://www.missdig811.org/excavation-pros/reference-material.html>

For those of you who may call in tickets, it will be important that you convey your work is related to farming activity and that you would prefer a 180-day project ticket.

I would, however, like to take this opportunity to encourage all users to utilize our online OneCallAccess platform to create their tickets. It's faster and more flexible than dialing 811, and there is nobody more knowledgeable about your project than you. After a little training, users with an External Plus account can create the project tickets mentioned previously.

This training is free and is conducted through our Web Ticket Department. Their email can be found on the reference page website listed above.

I want to be a resource for you, your company, and all MLICA members, so please feel free to reach out to me with questions, and I will do whatever I can to help.

Thank you for your time, and have a great day!

Eric Urbain

Director of External Affairs

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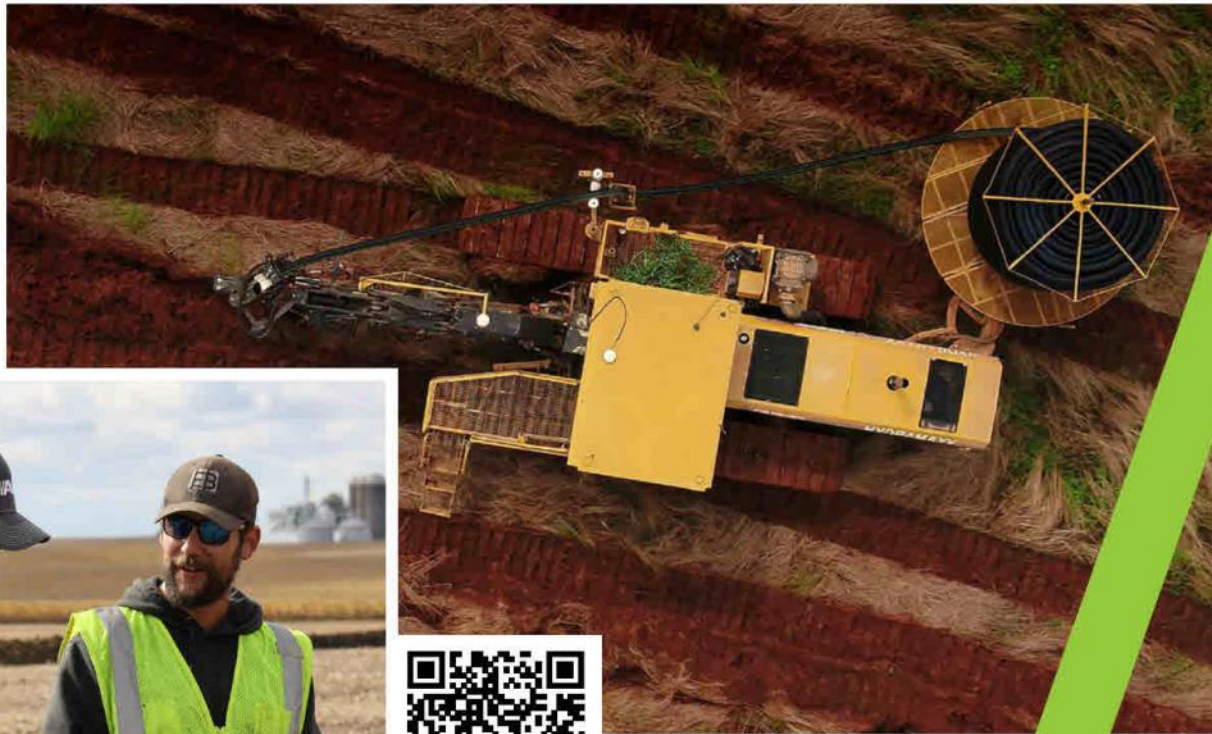
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# PLAYING IT SAFE



## Summer Safety - Dehydration

*Helpful tips for keeping you safe on the job*

In the simplest terms, dehydration occurs when you lose more water than you take in. Staying hydrated is important to keep all your body functions running smoothly. Whenever you are working outdoors or in warm environments, you'll want to take extra precautions as summer heats up.

### Water Loss

On average, adults lose almost 10 cups of water a day simply by sweating, breathing and going to the bathroom. Along with water, you also lose electrolytes, which are vital because they help maintain the balance of fluids in the body. When you become dehydrated, your body cannot function, possibly resulting in heat stroke or even death.

### Symptoms

How do you know if you're dehydrated? You'll begin to experience one or more of the following symptoms:

- Excessive thirst
- Sleepiness or tiredness
- Dry mouth
- Muscle weakness
- Headache
- Dizziness or lightheadedness

If you start to notice these warning signs, do not ignore them! Immediately take a break and give yourself time to recover.

### Preventing Dehydration

The best defense against dehydration is prevention. That sounds easy enough—consume lots of fluids and foods high in water such as fruits and vegetables—but determining how much fluid can be complicated.

Unfortunately, determining appropriate water intake isn't an exact science, especially because so much depends on age, physical condition, activity level, location and body chemistry. The best overall approach is to make a conscious effort to stay hydrated, and continue drinking even if you don't feel thirsty. In hot weather, skip coffee or soda, and make water your beverage of choice.

### Pace Yourself

During periods of heavy exertion, take frequent water breaks. Adjust your intake to match your activity level and working conditions to stay healthy and alert.

Be safe and healthy on the job with these helpful tips provided by **Prins Insurance, Inc.**

“Many times, the thirst mechanism is so weak that it is mistaken for hunger. Be sure to keep drinking water, even if it feels like you’ve just had a snack.”

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## Classifieds

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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](mailto:scook@michiganlica.org). Please include your name and phone number for verification purposes.

