

THE BACK OFFICE CHECKLIST: 10 THINGS THAT QUIETLY COST LANDSCAPING COMPANIES MONEY

None of these is a big project. Each one is a small piece of paperwork that, when it slips, turns into a fine, a lost bid, a bigger insurance bill or a weekend at the kitchen table. Check each line honestly.

	CHECK ONE BOX PER LINE. "YES" MEANS HANDLED, AND YOU COULD SHOW IT.	YES	NOT SURE	NO
01	EVERY LICENSE IS ON ONE CALENDAR State, county and city business licenses, contractor licenses and applicator licenses all renew on different dates. A lapsed one can mean a fine, a stop-work order or a lost bid.	☐	☐	☐
02	ANNUAL REPORT FILED IN EVERY STATE YOU'RE REGISTERED IN LLCs and corporations file a yearly report with each state they're registered in. Miss it and the state can dissolve or revoke the company.	☐	☐	☐
03	A W-9 BEFORE THE FIRST CHECK TO ANY SUB Get a W-9 from every subcontractor before you pay them. 1099-NEC forms are due to them and the IRS by January 31.	☐	☐	☐
04	A COMPLETE FILE FOR EVERY NEW HIRE Form I-9 within 3 business days of the first day of work, a W-4 and state withholding form, and the state new-hire report (federal limit 20 days; some states are faster). Seasonal crews count.	☐	☐	☐
05	PAYROLL RUNS THROUGH A SYSTEM THAT FILES THE TAXES Federal payroll returns are quarterly, deposits come due on a schedule, and W-2s are due January 31. Late deposits and late returns each carry their own penalties.	☐	☐	☐
06	WORKERS' COMP AUDIT PACKET READY BEFORE THE AUDITOR ASKS Payroll split by job class, plus a certificate of insurance from every sub. Without the certificates, the auditor can add your subs' pay to your payroll and raise the bill.	☐	☐	☐
07	A CERTIFICATE OF INSURANCE CAN GO OUT THE SAME DAY HOAs, property managers, cities and general contractors ask for a certificate, often with special wording, before you start. The crew that sends it first usually gets the job.	☐	☐	☐
08	APPLICATOR CREDITS, SPRAY RECORDS AND SITE PERMITS CURRENT Commercial applicators need a state license and continuing education credits, and states require application records. Disturbing an acre or more of ground generally needs stormwater permit coverage; many counties set a lower bar.	☐	☐	☐
09	TRUCKS OVER 10,000 LB HAVE THEIR DOT FILES A pickup and trailer can cross 10,000 lb. Crossing state lines means a USDOT number, driver files with medical cards, yearly inspections and a company update every 2 years. CDL drivers add drug and alcohol testing. Many states apply similar rules in-state.	☐	☐	☐
10	BOOKS RECONCILED EVERY MONTH, READY FOR YOUR CPA Receipts matched, bank accounts reconciled, quarterly estimated taxes planned. Some states also tax lawn and landscaping services. Clean books mean a smaller CPA bill and fewer surprises in April.	☐	☐	☐

COUNT YOUR "YES" ANSWERS

9 or 10: tight back office. Keep the calendar going.

6 to 8: a few leaks. Fix the "No" lines first, then the "Not sure."

5 or fewer: the paperwork is costing you money every month.

WANT A SECOND SET OF EYES?

Free 20-minute back office check by phone. You get a one-page fix list the same day.

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