

Chain Saw Safety

Working safely with a chain saw begins with training. Both the employer and the worker are responsible for ensuring safety. Safe measures include proper training, good body mechanics and felling technique, well-maintained equipment, and protective clothing.

Proper Maintenance

Proper chain saw maintenance is vital to safety. Using manufacturer's specifications, operators should know how to sharpen cutters. Refer to your chain saw manual for the correct filing technique. A sharp chainsaw is safer than a dull one.

Keep the saw clean, lubricated, and adjusted. Before starting work inspect and test the chain brake, chain catch, throttle lock, handles and guards, all nuts and bolts, spark arrestor, and muffler and air filter. The chain tension should be properly adjusted and the carburetor tuned.

Preventing accidents

Accident prevention is the most important task. A chainsaw is not only dangerous to the operator but to those around him. Each year thousands of people are injured by chainsaws.

Learn good cutting technique and proper saw operation from the start. Keep the saw close to the body. Bend from the knees, not the waist. Improper lifting techniques and poor posture contribute to accidents. Use good body mechanics to lessen fatigue and keep you more alert throughout the day.

Kickback occurs when the chain coming around the tip of the saw bar meets a solid object, such as a rock, another log, or the ground. Keep the saw bar tip clear of other objects, and avoid dangerous and awkward positions when cutting.

Do not wear bagging clothing because they might get caught in the saw. Wear heavy work pants without cuffs. Safety equipment should be inspected yearly. Proper equipment includes checking the expiration on hardhats. Personal protective equipment is vital and must include:

- Safety leg coverings from boot top to upper thigh

- Safety helmets. Helmets that are made out of safety plastic, heat, cold and UV rays can break them down and make them brittle. It is recommended that hardhats be replaced every two years.
- Eye or face protection.
- Gloves.
- Steel toe boots.
- First aid kits at work site and in crew vehicles.
- First aid and CPR training is essential for all supervisors and employees. The most important skills would be treating traumatic cuts and transporting victims.

Have a Plan

Having a branch or tree felling plan, and following it, are essential for everybody's safety. Know how to get the branch or tree to the ground before making any cuts. When two or more people are working together, all others must work at least two tree lengths from the person cutting the tree.

Each tree is different, so deal with each tree individually. Look for potential hazards on the ground and overhead. Keep people and animals free of the work area. Do not cut on windy days because the wind may change the direction in which the tree may fall. Remove brush and any other obstacles that are around the work area. Don't work alone in an isolated area. Plan an escape route when cutting down trees. The escape area should extend to the rear of the expected felling line.

Most importantly, do not use the chainsaw when fatigued or ill, or when the operator's reactions are slow. This includes when taking medications or after drinking alcoholic beverages. The chainsaw operator must be alert and cautious. Respect the chainsaw, but don't be afraid of it. If the operator is not comfortable handling the saw on any given day, have him turn it off and walk away.

Sources

Crossroads, Spring 1998. University of Wisconsin—Madison
Hamilton, George, Respect the Awesome Power of the Chainsaw, UNH Cooperative Extension
Operator's safety manual. Husqvarna,