



Chainsaw Safety

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), approximately 36,000 people are treated in hospitals for chainsaw injuries each year – and 40% of those injuries are cuts to the legs. Chainsaw hazards can be minimized through safe operating procedures and proper personal protective equipment (PPE).

Be familiar with these five chainsaw safety features:

- 1. Chain brake:** activated by the force of a kickback or manually activated so the operator can safely change position
- 2. Safety throttle:** requires the operator to hold down a trigger under the rear handle of the saw to operate it
- 3. Chain catcher:** helps prevent the chain from being thrown backward into the operator if it breaks or derails
- 4. Hand guard:** protects the user's right hand from being injured if the chain breaks or derails
- 5. Kill switch:** immediately stops the engine from running

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Top 5 Chainsaw Best Practices

1. Be familiar with a chainsaw's safety features.
2. Always wear proper personal protective equipment.
3. Familiarize yourself with your surroundings, and look out for any hazards.
4. Properly position yourself before making a cut.
5. Keep chainsaws properly maintained and stored.

Fueling a Chainsaw

- Use approved containers for transporting fuel to the saw.
- Dispense fuel at least 10 feet away from ignition sources. No smoking during fueling.
- Use a funnel or flexible hose when pouring fuel into the saw.
- Never attempt to fuel a running or hot saw.

Before Starting a Chainsaw

- Check controls, chain tension and all bolts and handles. Ensure they are functioning properly and are adjusted according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Make sure the chain is sharp and the lubrication reservoir is full.
- Apply all PPE – safety glasses, hearing protection, hard hat, heavy work gloves, steel toe shoes and cut-resistant legwear (i.e. chaps).
- Read the manufacturer's warnings and steps for safe operation.
- Do not wear loose-fitting clothing.

Starting a Chainsaw

- Make sure the chain brake is set.
- Start the saw on the ground or on another stable surface.
- Start the saw at least 10 feet from the fueling area.
- Never drop-start a chainsaw.

Safe Chainsaw Operation

- Clear dirt, debris, small tree limbs and rocks from the path of the saw's chain. Look for nails, spikes or other metal in the tree before cutting.
- Clear the work area of bystanders. Ask helpers to stand at least 30 feet away from the cutting operation.
- Shut off the saw or engage its chain brake when carrying the saw on rough or uneven terrain.
- Keep hands on the saw's handles and maintain secure footing while cutting.
- Always stand to the side of the chainsaw.
- Be careful not to bind the saw up in the tree trunk or limbs.
- Apply controlled cuts and only cut ground-level, easy-to-reach branches.
- Reapply bar oil and tip grease per the manufacturer's guidelines.
- Watch for branches under tension as they may spring out once cut.
- Equip gasoline-powered chainsaws with a protective device that minimizes chainsaw kickback.
- Avoid kickback by not sawing with the tip and keeping the tip guard in place, if equipped.

Common Injury Risks

- Vibration from extensive cutting can cause muscle fatigue and increased heartrate. Take frequent breaks and stay hydrated.
- Strains can occur from lifting, pulling or throwing branches or debris. Take time to use proper material handling techniques.
- Slips, trips and falls are common due to uneven surfaces in grassy areas or debris in the work area. Wear proper footwear and maintain awareness of where you are walking.
- For more information, visit OSHA's Chainsaw Safety page.

