Chainsaw Safety Meeting Kit

THREE MAIN HAZARDS OF CHAINSAWS

Some chainsaws are electric, but most have gasoline-powered, two-cycle motors. These saws have become lighter, faster and more powerful, increasing the hazard to users. Three main hazards are associated with chainsaw use: **Noise, vibration and cuts.**

Noise: When the ear is exposed to high levels of noise, such as those produced by a chainsaw, hearing loss occurs. This is permanent and worsens over time, but is easily preventable. Wear properly fitted ear plugs or muffs, preferably both.

Vibration: Over time, the vibration produced by a chainsaw can cause circulatory problems in your hand and fingers.

Cuts: These are the most common injuries caused by chainsaws, ranging from minor hand injuries while filing the chain to major amputation from saw kickback.

BEFORE STARTING A CHAINSAW

Prior to beginning the task of cutting, a chainsaw operator must do the following:

- Check controls, chain tension, and all bolts and handles to ensure they are functioning properly and adjusted according to the manufacturer’s instructions.
- Make sure the chain is sharp and the lubrication reservoir is full.
- Fuel a gasoline-powered saw at least 10 feet from any sources of ignition, and ensure that the fuel is a proper mix of gas and oil based on the manufacturer’s specifications.
- Check the fuel container to ensure it is metal or plastic, does not exceed a 5-gallon capacity and is approved by a nationally recognized testing laboratory.

- Be sure that gasoline-, electric- and battery-powered chainsaws are equipped with a protective device that minimizes chainsaw kickback.

WHAT EMPLOYEES NEED TO KNOW AND DO ABOUT CHAINSAW SAFETY

When using a chain saw, wear protective clothing. This includes a hard hat, safety goggles, gloves (for a good grip), hearing protection, steel-toed shoes with nonslip soles, and trim-fitting clothes that won't get caught in the chain.

Start your chainsaw according to the manual's direction. Clear the work area so the chain won't touch anything but the wood you want to cut. Then, place the saw on a level surface—never rest this tool on your leg or drop-start it. Stand to the side of the saw so you won't follow the cut through into your leg. Also, stand on the uphill side of your work so it won't roll into you. Hold the saw parallel to the ground with your left arm straight for better control.

Keep both hands on the saw while it's running. Work slowly, don't rush. Let the chainsaw do the work; never force it. Avoid cutting above mid-chest height.

It's a good idea to take frequent breaks from cutting so you don't operate the saw when you're tired.

BEWARE OF KICKBACK

Although some chainsaw injuries are caused by operator error, kickback is the greatest cause of chainsaw injuries. A kickback usually happens when the chain and bar get caught in a cut. This usually happens when the operator doesn't notice that tip of the bar is hitting another branch or obstacle. The chain stops for split second, transferring momentum back towards the operator. The operator then might either lose control of the saw or lose balance, bringing the saw into contact with the body.

Some chainsaws have tip guards to help prevent kickbacks. Keeping your left arm straight and locked can help prevent an injury from a kickback by making the saw travel up during a kickback and keeping it away from you. Chain brakes are designed to instantly stop the saw when the operator releases the handle. While this doesn't prevent a kickback, it can reduce or prevent an injury if the operator loses their grip on the saw when a kickback happens.

CHAINSAW SAFETY PRECAUTIONS

When moving a chainsaw, carry it below the waist, with the engine off and guide bar pointed to the rear.

If your saw is electric, make sure you use an extension cord that's approved for outdoor use and don't use the saw in a damp environment. Fuel gasoline-powered chainsaws outdoors and be careful not to overfill or spill the fuel. Never refuel a hot saw. Let it cool down first, and have a fire extinguisher nearby.

It's dangerous to work alone with a chainsaw. Have a companion within calling distance, but keep bystanders and helpers at a safe distance from operation so that they will not be injured.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Based on the inherent danger of working with chainsaws, it's vital that employees exposed to chainsaw operations be given the proper education and skills training so that they know how to work skillfully, keeping themselves and their co-workers safe.

CHAINSAW SAFETY PROCEDURES – HIGH RISK CHAINSAW OPERATIONS

Even with proper training, operating a chainsaw is inherently dangerous. Employees should never attempt to do jobs beyond their abilities or training. **High-risk chainsaw operations include:**

- Operating a chainsaw above ground level, such as in a tree

or on a ladder
- Working on a steep slope or uneven ground
- Cutting trees known to split
- Working in inclement weather, such as heavy rain or extreme cold
- Working for long periods of time with no breaks

BEST SAFETY CHAINSAW PRACTICES

- They must be operated with two hands.
- Always start your saw on a surface that is as clear of debris, firm and level as possible.
- Adjust your saw so that when it is idling, the chain is stopped.
- If the saw is fitted with a chain brake, keep it in good working order. Never modify or remove a chain brake.
- Wear a hardhat, preferably with mounted face guard and hearing protection.
- Wear gloves when working with or fueling the saw, handling or changing the chain.
- Wear boots with good sole grips.
- Wear leg protectors.
- When carrying the saw, keep the chain bar to the rear. You won’t fall on the chain if you stumble.

FINAL WORD

Make sure you read the operator’s manual and follow the instructions for safe use of a chainsaw. Your safety comes first, even in an emergency.