

Using a Chain Saw Safely

All PPE items must be inspected prior to each use for damage, cleanliness, etc. and replaced if needed.



A Fact Sheet prepared by the National Telecommunications Safety Panel

Introduction

Following a storm or other natural disaster, it is very common to encounter downed trees and/or tree limbs that must be cleared in order to restore service. Large-scale tree removal and tree trimming is best left to professionals, but smaller jobs may be performed by individuals using chain saws. A chain saw is a very useful tool, but it can also be very dangerous if not used properly. This fact sheet describes safe use of gasoline-powered chain saws, but almost all of these precautions apply to electric or pneumatic saws as well.

Preparation

Before beginning any task involving a chain saw:

- Read the owner's manual and become familiar with all the features and operation of the saw.
- Check controls, chain tension, and all bolts and handles for proper function and adjustment.
- Make sure the saw has these features, and they are working:
 - Chain brake (manual or inertia)
 - Chain catcher
 - Safety throttle switch
 - On/off switch
 - Spark arrester
- Make sure the carburetor is properly adjusted.
- Make sure the chain is sharp and have extra chains on hand.
- Have an approved fuel container available for refueling.
- Remove or secure any loose-fitting clothing, straps, etc. that could become tangled in the saw.

Personal Protective Equipment

The following PPE is recommended for anyone using a chain saw. Check with your Company's Safety dept. for the specific requirements of your organization.

- Head protection – hardhat or helmet.
- Eye/Face protection – face shield with goggles or glasses.
- Hearing protection – ear plugs and/or muffs.
- Hand protection – leather gloves
- Leg protection – chaps or chain saw protective pants
- Foot protection – safety toe boots



Inspect the Work Site for Hazards

Upon arrival at the work site, check for:

- Power, telephone, and cable TV lines. **Assume all lines to be energized, whether they are downed or aerial!** Be aware that lines can become energized at any moment by contact with tree limbs.
- Broken or hanging branches, leaning trees, poles, or other structures that are unstable and may fall.
- Young trees that other trees have fallen on and bent over. When cleared, they may spring back up suddenly.
- Trip hazards – downed trees, rocks, holes, wire, cable, etc.
- Poisonous plants.
- Dangerous insects, reptiles, or animals.
- Vehicle traffic if near a roadway.

Operating the Saw Safely

Follow these guidelines when operating the chain saw:

- Fuel the saw at least 10 ft. away from any ignition sources. Allow the saw to cool before refueling.
- Place the saw on a solid, stable surface for starting. Do not "drop start" the saw.
- Do not use a gasoline-powered chain saw indoors.
- Plan an escape path away from the projected fall of the limb or tree.
- Clear the area of obstacles that might interfere with cutting the tree or obstruct the escape path.
- Keep other persons away from the saw while cutting and beyond the "fall zone" of limbs or trees.
- Watch for objects under tension and avoid felling an object onto another object.
- Use caution when cutting a dead tree as the top may break off.
- Keep hands on the handles and maintain secure footing while operating the saw.
- Maintain a firm grip on the saw and always be prepared for kickback.
- Watch for nails, wire, rocks, etc. before and during cutting.
- Do not cut with the tip of the saw.
- Do not cut above shoulder level.
- Do not use the saw on a ladder or in a tree.
- If using a saw while elevated in a bucket truck, attach the saw with a lanyard to the bucket or boom in case it is dropped.

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- Shut off the saw or engage the chain brake whenever the saw is carried more than 50 ft., or across uneven terrain.
- Avoid working alone if possible.
- Take adequate rest breaks and avoid working when fatigue reduces your concentration.
- Practice proper body mechanics when cutting – bend at the knees, not the back. Do not over-reach.
- Depending on weather conditions, be alert for symptoms and take precautions to prevent heat or cold stress.
- Stop work under high wind or possible lightning conditions.
- When bucking up (cutting) a downed tree, place a plastic wedge in the cut to keep the saw from binding up.

References

OSHA Fact Sheet “Working Safely with Chain Saws”

http://www.osha.gov/OshDoc/data_Hurricane_Facts/chainsaws.pdf

OSHA Fact Sheet “Tree Trimming Tips”

http://www.osha.gov/OshDoc/data_Hurricane_Facts/trim.pdf

American Red Cross “Fact Sheet: Using a Chain Saw Safely”

<http://www.redcross.org/pubs/dspubs/chainsaw.pdf>