

2024

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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KNOW YOUR CHAINSAW AND USE IT SAFELY

Following simple safety tips makes chainsaw work safer and more effective.

Photo courtesy Pixabay

Before using a chainsaw, you should know how to choose a model suited to your sawing needs, understand and utilize the appropriate chainsaw Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), how to carry and refuel the saw safely, and what steps to take to respond to a chainsaw injury if it occurs. These are recommendations made by Dan Neenan, National Education Center for Agricultural Safety (NECAS) in Peosta, Iowa. Being informed about the necessary chainsaw precautions and respecting the equipment's power helps avoid tragic chainsaw accidents, which the Center for Disease Control (CDC) reports number around 36,000 individuals each year.

"There are multiple chainsaw brands available, and in choosing one, look at its safety features," Neenan says. "Of course, you need to look at the performance side of the saw and the person who will use it. But look for one with features such as marked on/off settings, a chain brake, and a safety throttle."

A chain catcher, spark arrestor, vibration reduction system, trigger and throttle interlock, right-hand guard, muffler, centrifugal clutch, and bumper spikes to help reduce rotational kickback or push-pull reactive forces are all valuable safety features.

Chainsaws typically operate on 2-cycle engines, which differ in numerous ways from 4-cycle engines. Gas for the saw can be mixed or purchased pre-mixed. A chainsaw requires high-quality gasoline with a minimum octane rating of 89 and 2-cycle oil specially designed for chainsaws—a clean container for fuel and measuring tools. The gas should be ethanol-free to prevent damage to the engine. Follow manufacturer guidelines regarding the gas/oil ratio.

"Never add gas to a hot saw," Neenan says. "If you run out of gas while you're working, that's a good time to take a break, give the engine time to cool off, and come back to refuel."

Adding fuel to a hot chainsaw could result in the combustion of gas vapors that come into contact with the saw muffler. Mixing gas is less costly than purchasing a pre-mixed product. However, the gas mixture has a short shelf life, and if the saw isn't used frequently, it may deteriorate.

"Pre-mixed fuel has a two-year shelf life," Neenan says. "If you store the fuel for winter, read the saw manual for directions about adding a fuel stabilizer."

Proper PPE includes head protection, eye protection, gloves, chainsaw chaps or pants, and boots. In selecting head protection, it's vital to have hearing protection.

A chainsaw noise is 110 decibels. Acceptable noise levels are below 85 decibels. Operating a chainsaw for an extended time without hearing protection will cause damage. You may not notice it right away, but over time, you'll experience hearing problems."

Safety glasses that wrap around the face will protect your eyes. The glasses must be impact-resistant and should be comfortable to wear. Chainsaw gloves offer excellent protection and are available with a great fit. Features include anti-vibration, water resistance or waterproof, certified cut protection, and flexible fit.

"For any of the PPE, if it's not comfortable, you're not going to use it," Neenan says.

Chainsaw pants and chaps are designed to keep a chainsaw blade from cutting into the legs. If the blade comes into contact with the operator's leg, the pants/chaps material will wrap around the blade and stop it before it can cause damage. Protective boots will be puncture and water-resistant. Some brands are designed to comply with OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) standards.

The proper way to safely carry a chainsaw is to grasp the handle so the bar faces backward. Carrying it over your shoulder puts the saw blade up against your neck. If carrying a chainsaw on your shoulder is necessary, use a bar cover and ensure the saw is turned off.

Before using the saw, make sure the blade is sharp. A dull blade can decrease efficiency, cause kickback, and damage the saw. A sharp chain will cut through wood quickly and easily. A dull chain will require added pressure and effort to cut. Check the chain tension and make sure that, once it's released, it easily retracts back and stays firmly in position.

When it's time to cut wood, scan your environment. Are there other people in the area? What direction will the tree/branch you're cutting take when it falls? Is there any debris in the area where you plan to cut? Any nails or other obstacles? Anyone in the area should be twice as far from a tree as its fall length. Otherwise, they may not be able to get out of the way.

Tips for safe cutting:

1. Secure your footing by placing one foot in front of the other for a balanced standing position.
2. Never cut directly over your head or between your legs.
3. Beware of and avoid distractions, keeping your eyes on the saw action.
4. Be prepared for an unexpected kickback.
5. Don't cut with the blade tip because it may lead to kickback.

"If you're carrying the saw more than 50 feet, release the throttle or shut it off before you move away," Neenan says.

Being prepared to respond to an emergency chainsaw injury may save a life. Ensure that you know the address of the work site or have it close by for reference if emergency help needs to be summoned.

"If you call 911, make sure you are the last one to hang up," Neenan says. "If you've ever called, they ask you 20 questions. Understand that, with the first couple of questions, they're

dispatching the ambulance to your location. The rest of the questions help them determine what's needed for the rescue. Will they need Fire and Rescue in addition to an ambulance? Is there any danger or threat to responders? All that information is important, so answer all the questions."

Keeping a Stop the Bleed kit on site could save a life. Kits are available at sites such as www.bleedingkits.org and include a variety of supplies related to various levels of injury.

"These kits provide an adjustable tourniquet that stops heavy bleeding without damaging healthy tissue at the wound site," Neenan says. "A chainsaw injury could result in a serious bleeding injury. Keep a kit on hand and know how to use it. They are well worth the investment."

For additional information, watch a two-part video series on chainsaw safety:

Part 1

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H9BegDz1Beo>

Part 2 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7qiA28e9cOk>.

Funding for this educational article comes from the Central States Center for Agricultural Safety and Health and the University of Nebraska Medical Center.