



Safety Scene

Chainsaws Are Powerful, Dangerous

Take these safety precautions to avoid being one of the thousands to report chainsaw injuries every year.

by Molly E. Butz

Spring and summer bring with them the familiar roar of chainsaws. From storm damage cleanup to sawing up wood for a backyard bonfire, chainsaws have found a useful place for many people in many places. Chainsaws also serve their purpose in our industry, and many component manufacturers utilize chainsaws year round for various workplace activities including cutting up discarded trusses and trimming engineered joists to the correct size.

Chainsaws are powerful, efficient and effective. According to Lowe's Online How-To Library, "you won't find a tool with more power per inch." But all of that power brings with it an entirely new level of danger; and with thousands of chainsaw injuries reported every year, extra attention to safety is the key to protecting yourself and your employees when using a chainsaw.

Using any tool can pose a safety risk, and chainsaws are no exception.

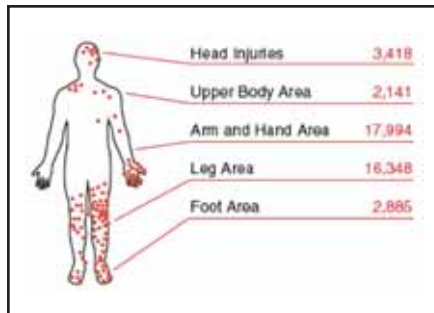


Figure 1. Accident location and frequency as related to chain saw use (1994). (Source: U.S. Product Safety Commission)

at a glance

- ☐ Chainsaws are powerful; according to Lowe's, "you won't find a tool with more power per inch."
- ☐ Chainsaws were designed to cut only wood, so make sure that all other objects are cleared from the area before using them.
- ☐ Always use the proper personal protective equipment (PPE) when operating a chainsaw.

For starters, chainsaws were meant to cut one thing: wood. Using a chainsaw for any other purpose is asking for trouble. Even brief contact with a rock or the ground will dull the cutting chain and pose a safety risk.

One of the most important things you can do to protect yourself from a possible injury is wear the appropriate and necessary personal protective equipment, or PPE. The following list includes all of the PPE required by OSHA for anyone using a chainsaw.

- Leg protection made with cut-resistant material such as chaps or leggings. The leg protection should cover the full length of the thigh all the way to the top of the boot on both legs.
- Foot protection made with cut-resistant material. The boots should cover and support the ankle and include steel toes and nonskid soles.
- Gloves.
- Ear plugs or earmuff-style hearing protection.
- Head protection if there is potential for falling or flying objects.
- Eye protection with side shields.

The accident location and frequency diagram from the U.S. Product Safety Commission (Figure 1) shows how important PPE can be; most injuries occur on the lower left leg and the left arm. Those are the areas you should be sure to protect the most.

Beyond PPE, there are a few other things that should be noted about general chainsaw operation that can help you prevent injuries. Here's a helpful list of things to keep in mind:

- Never remove any kickback device.
- Always read the manufacturer's owners manual for operating instructions and safety information.
- Start the chainsaw on the ground or other place where it is firmly supported.
- Make sure the chain brake is engaged when you start the chainsaw.
- Hold the chainsaw with both hands while cutting.
- Never overreach, cut above shoulder height or cut directly over your head.


- Keep your work area clear of people and clutter.
- Never operate a malfunctioning chainsaw.

Refueling a chainsaw can also be dangerous. Here are some safety tips on refueling to prevent an accident or injury from occurring:

- Check the fuel line, tank cap and all connections for leaks.
- Allow the chainsaw to cool for two or three minutes before attempting to refuel.
- Use the correct fuel/oil mixture recommended by the manufacturer of your chainsaw.
- Do not smoke during refueling.
- Clean up any spilled fuel from the motor.
- Always refuel at least ten feet from any open flame and start the chainsaw at least ten feet from the refueling area.


Using any tool can pose a safety risk, and chainsaws are no exception. Before you begin any project involving a chainsaw, whether it's work or play, be sure your saw is in good working condition, you have a plan for your project, and you've followed all of the necessary safety precautions. Remember, when it comes to chainsaw operation, Safety First! **SBC**

To pose a question for this column or to learn more about WTCA's Operation Safety Program, contact WTCA Staff at 608/274-4849, email wtca@sbcindustry.com, or view the Operation Safety demonstration online at www.wtcatko.com.



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