

Chainsaw Safety

Chainsaws are one of the most hazardous machineries if not safely used. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), more than 30,000 people are treated in emergency rooms due to unsafe use of chainsaws. Chainsaws are fast, powerful, and unforgiving. Most chainsaw injuries do not happen because the equipment fails; they happen because of small mistakes, rushing, inexperience, or losing focus for just a second.



Work Area Safety

Before starting any saw, take control of the work area. This is where a lot of incidents can be prevented before they even start. Make sure the area is marked and clear of people. When cutting trees, everyone should be at least two tree lengths away. You also need to think about your footing and your escape route before making a cut.

Key things to look for:

- Clear obstacles that could affect footing or block your retreat path.
- Identify overhead hazards like “widow-makers” or hanging limbs.
- Locate any electrical lines in or near the work area.
 - Watch for uneven ground, brush, or debris that could trip you up



Pre-Operation

Before starting the chainsaw, do a full inspection. Check that the chain tension is correct, controls are working, and all bolts and handles are secure. Make sure the saw is the right size for the job. If you are fueling, do it at least ten feet away from any ignition source, and only use approved fuel containers. Never operate a saw that is damaged or has safety features disabled.



A quick inspection goes a long way. A poorly maintained saw is more dangerous than a sharp, well-functioning one.

Here are a few things to look for:

- Check chain tension, controls, bolts, and handles.
- Make sure the chain is sharp and properly lubricated.
- Ensure all safety devices (especially the chain brakes) are working
- Never use a saw that is damaged or has safety features disabled

When fueling and preparing:

- Fuel at least ten feet away from ignition sources
- Only use approved containers (metal/plastic, ≤5 gallons, properly rated)
- Look for nails, rocks, or debris in the cut path
- Clear dirt and debris before cutting



Operating the Chainsaw

Once you begin operating the chainsaw, always stay in control. Start it on the ground or a stable surface with the chain brake engaged. Keep both hands on the saw, maintain solid footing, and plan every cut before you make it. Think about where the tree or limb is going to fall and make sure that path is clear. Be especially aware of tension in limbs or wood that could snap or shift unexpectedly. Once you start cutting, control and awareness are everything. Every cut should be planned.



Safe operation includes:

- Start the saw on the ground or stable surface with the brake engaged

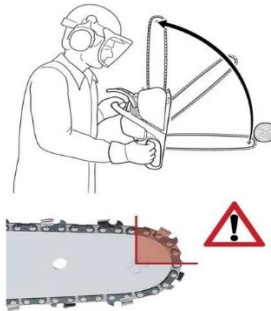
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- Keep both hands on the saw and maintain solid footing
- Plan the fall path and make sure the area is clear
- Watch for limbs or wood under tension that could snap or shift

Kickback is one of the biggest risks, so avoid cutting with the tip of the bar and always be ready for sudden movement. Never cut directly overhead, and do not put yourself in a position where you're off balance. When you're moving with the saw, engage the chain brake or shut it off, especially over longer distances or rough terrain.

Be especially aware of kickback:

- Avoid using the tip of the bar
- Keep a firm grip with thumbs wrapped around handles
- Use saws with chain brakes and low-kickback features



Also remember:

- Do not cut above shoulder height
- Be extra careful when using a ladder or lifting device (the limbs can swing and hit the ladder or hit people)
- Shut off or engage the chain brake when moving distances or on rough terrain
- Take breaks – Especially in the heat

Know Your Limits

Not every job is routine. Some situations increase risk significantly, and that's where people get hurt. Use extra caution with:

- Trees on slopes or unstable ground
- Trees with heavy lean or visible rot
- Trees that may split while cutting
- Any cutting above ground level (ladders, elevated positions)

- If it feels outside your skill level - stop and reassess. It is always better to stop and ask than risk something that could cause injury or damage
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PPE and Training

The best type of training for chainsaw work is hands-on training. This should primarily be done by someone who is experienced using the chainsaw. If you have the capability of assigning someone as the designated trainer, you should do so.

Chainsaw work always requires full PPE. Minimum PPE includes:

- Hard hat
- Eye and face protection
- Hearing protection
- Gloves
- Chainsaw chaps or leg protection
- Proper work boots



Closing

Chainsaw work is high-risk, but it's manageable if safe operating procedures are performed. Control the area, inspect your equipment, plan your cuts, and do not take shortcuts. If you are uncomfortable or feel unsafe, stop what you are doing and notify a supervisor.