



# Frequently Asked Questions

## Chainsaw Safety



Question	Answer
What safety precautions are needed when using a chainsaw?	Proper personal protective equipment must be worn when operating the saw, including hand, foot, leg, eye, face, hearing, and head protection. Do not wear loose-fitting clothing. Be careful the trunk or tree limbs will not bind against the saw. Watch for branches under tension that may spring out when cut.
What safety features are on chainsaws?	Chainsaw safety features: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rear handguard.</li><li>• Stop switch.</li><li>• Throttle interlock.</li><li>• Safety decals.</li><li>• Vibration reduction mounts/system.</li><li>• Chain catcher.</li><li>• Chain brake &amp; front handguard.</li><li>• Exhaust.</li></ul>
What are the most common chainsaw injuries?	Most injuries involve the hands and lower extremities with less than 10% involving injuries to the head and neck regions. Deaths while operating a chainsaw are extremely rare. The most common hazards associated with chainsaws are injuries caused by kickback, push-back, and pull-in.
Do you need training to use a chainsaw?	It is essential that anyone who uses a chainsaw at work has received adequate training and that he or she be competent in using a chainsaw for the type of work required. In recent years (in forestry and arboriculture) direct contact with a chainsaw has caused five deaths and many serious injuries.
What types of hazards are chainsaw users exposed to?	Be aware of main hazards of chainsaw use – kickback, hearing loss, vibration disease, and carbon monoxide poisoning.
Do I need to read the operator’s manual for the chainsaw I’m using?	Yes, read every word of your owner’s manual and learn it thoroughly. Every chainsaw is different, so become familiar with the manual for the model you will use. The owner’s manual contains safety and operating procedures including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Follow all safety warnings, labels, and instructions for your chainsaw.</li><li>• Do not operate a chainsaw that is damaged. Keep the chainsaw maintained so it stays in good working order.</li><li>• Do not operate a gas-powered chainsaw in an enclosed area. This will help you avoid dangerous carbon monoxide fumes.</li><li>• Shut down the engine and apply the chain brake before setting the chainsaw down.</li><li>• Keep the handles clean, dry, and free of slippery oil or fuel mixture.</li><li>• Use caution when handling fuel and move away from the fueling area before starting the engine.</li><li>• Carry the chainsaw with the engine stopped and the brake engaged.</li><li>• Keep all body parts away from the engine’s muffler, which can become very hot during operation.</li><li>• Always keep the chainsaw’s blade lubricated to prevent overheating and resulting damage to the tool.</li><li>• Maintain proper tension on the chainsaw blade.</li></ul>



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What are some safe work practices for chainsaw use?

Failure to use a chainsaw properly can cause serious personal injury.

- Understand your limits. Sometimes it's better to call a professional if your project is beyond your abilities and comfort level. It's okay, don't let your ego get in the way of your safety.
- Never use a chainsaw when fatigued or under the influence of medication, drugs, or alcohol.
- Do not stand on ladders, scaffolds, trees, or any unstable surface when using the chainsaw.
- Maintain good balance and footing. Do not overreach or cut above shoulder level.
- If you're a beginner start simple with your projects. Cutting logs for firewood or branches is a great place to start but don't start with felling a large tree – start with a small tree. Practice, practice, practice and start small.
- Do not cut alone. Always have someone nearby – but not too close to you – just in case something goes wrong.
- Always have a good first aid kit nearby.
- Never cut wood being held by someone else.
- Do not operate a chainsaw with one hand. Keep a tight grip with both hands.
- Wrap your fingers and thumbs around the top and rear handles.
- Remain aware of your surroundings. Keep your work area free of tripping hazards. Make sure your cutting arm is away from obstructions.
- Run the throttle at full speed. Maintain steady pressure on the cutting arm to the wood being cut. Allow the chainsaw to do the work and don't apply heavy pressure.
- Don't allow the tip of the cutting arm to come in contact with any objects. This can cause a lightning-fast reverse reaction where the chainsaw kicks the guide bar up and back toward the user. Chainsaw kickback can result in serious injury.
- When cutting a tree trunk that's lying on the ground, let up on the downward pressure as you near the end of the cut. Keep the blade from coming in contact with the ground, which could cause personal injury and damage to the chainsaw.
- Never cut with the nose or tip of your chainsaw. This will cause kickback and can lead to a serious injury.
- Never use a chainsaw to cut above your head.
- Before you refuel, allow the chainsaw to cool down.
- Keep your chainsaw out of reach of children.



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What is “kickback”?

Kickback occurs when the upper portion of the tip comes in contact with another object, or the chain is pinched in a cut. As a result, the chainsaw will violently jump or kick back towards the operator. To prevent kickback injury the following precautions should be taken:

- Buy chainsaws with a chain brake (preferably inertia activated) or install one after purchase.
- Check the brake mechanism before each use for effective operation.
- Use a low kickback chain (meets American National Standards Institute B175.1-1991 Safety Requirements for Gasoline Powered Saws).
- Sharpen the saw’s chain frequently; a sharp chain is safer than a dull one (if wood shavings become dusty the chain is dull and needs to be sharpened).
- Hold the chainsaw firmly while in use.
- Check the chain tension.
- Never bend over the chainsaw, if you stand up straight and to the left of the bar any kickback should go over your right shoulder. Proper stance for chainsaw use is standing properly using the boxer stance. For right-handed people, that means putting the left foot slightly in front and at a 45-degree angle, with the right foot slightly in back. Keep your feet approximately shoulder-width apart. Bend your knees.
- Wear protective equipment, especially head protection and chainsaw chaps or cut resistant pants.
- Don't cut above shoulder height.
- Never hold the chainsaw with one hand or by one handle.
- Always begin the cut at peak revolutions.
- Clear brush and debris from the area to avoid trip hazards.

Who do I contact if I have additional questions?

For additional questions, please contact your Health, Safety, and Work-Life Service Center (HSWL SC), Safety and Environmental Health Officer (SEHO). Additional resources and contact information are available on the HSWL SC [Chainsaw Hazards](#) CGPortal Online page.