Cutting Down on Chainsaw Injuries Meeting Kit



UNDERAPPRECIATED AND OVERLOOKED

Based on inherent dangers of chainsaws, it’s vital that employees exposed to chainsaw operations be given the proper education and skills training so that they know how to work skillfully, keeping themselves and their co-workers safe.

Training and skills development are often overlooked and underappreciated. It’s partly because most workers can manage to start a chainsaw and cut something without incident. Today we have both electric- and battery-powered chainsaws that are easy to start. While it’s great that such advanced technology exists, this technology makes it simpler for workers to operate chainsaws without appropriate education or training about the tool or cutting trees.

DANGERS/HAZARDS

Kickback: Although some chainsaw injuries are caused by operator error, kickback is the greatest cause of chainsaw injuries. A kickback usually happens when the chain and bar get caught in a cut. This usually happens when the operator doesn’t notice that tip of the bar is hitting another branch or obstacle. The chain stops for split second, transferring momentum back towards the operator. The operator then might either lose control of the saw or lose balance, bringing the saw into contact with the body.

Some chainsaws have tip guards to help prevent kickbacks. Keeping your left arm straight and locked can help prevent an injury from a kickback by making the saw travel up during a kickback and keeping it away from you. Chain brakes are designed to instantly stop the saw when the operator releases the handle. While this doesn’t prevent a kickback, it can reduce or prevent an injury if the operator loses their grip on the saw when a kickback happens.

Noise: When the ear is exposed to high levels of noise, such as those produced by a chainsaw, hearing loss occurs. This is permanent and worsens over time, but is easily preventable. Wear properly fitted ear plugs or muffs, preferably both.

PRELIMINARY STEPS FOR CHAINSAW OPERATIONS

Inspect the area for anything that might put their safety at risk.

- Anything above the work site that could dislodge into the work site
- An escape route in case employees need to reach safety quickly
- Debris (rocks, large branches, tree stumps, or nails)
- Electric power lines

OPERATIONAL SAFETY CHECKLIST

Prior to beginning the task of cutting, a chainsaw operator must do the following:

- Check controls, chain tension, and all bolts and handles to ensure they are functioning properly and adjusted according to the manufacturer’s instructions.
- Make sure the chain is sharp and the lubrication reservoir is full.
- Fuel a gasoline-powered saw at least 10 feet from any sources of ignition, and ensure that the fuel is a proper mix of gas and oil based on the manufacturer’s specifications.
- Check the fuel container to ensure it is metal or plastic, does not exceed a 5-gallon capacity and is approved by a nationally recognized testing laboratory.
- Be sure that gasoline-, electric- and battery-powered chainsaws are equipped with a protective device that minimizes chainsaw kickback.

HIGH-RISK CHAINSAW OPERATIONS

Operating a chainsaw is always inherently dangerous. Employees should never attempt to do jobs beyond their abilities or training.

- Operating a chainsaw above ground level, such as in a tree or on a ladder
- Working on a steep slope or uneven ground
- Cutting trees known to split
- Working in inclement weather, such as heavy rain or extreme cold
- Working for long periods of time with no breaks

CHAINSAW SAFETY AND OPERATION TECHNIQUES

Employees should practice proper chainsaw safety and operation techniques.

- Making sure the fall area is free of debris or hazards
- Avoiding cutting an object so that it falls into nearby objects
- This can cause both objects to fall in unexpected and possibly dangerous ways
- Keeping the tip guard in place
- Gripping the handle with both hands
- Avoiding, whenever possible, cutting an object under tension
- Being aware of kick-back
- Always operate with two hands. If one hand is removed to start a saw in mid-air, or for any other reason, the operator is not in control of the tool.

- Always start your saw on a surface that is as clear of debris, firm and level as possible.
- Adjust your saw so that when it is idling, the chain is stopped.
- If the saw is fitted with a chain brake, keep it in good working order. Never modify or remove a chain brake.

FINAL WORD

Most trades people and workers can pick up a modern chainsaw and operate it without any training or instruction. That is the danger or hazard. Data shows that there are more injuries and fatalities in work related chainsaw operations than ever before.