

Chain Saw Safety after a Disaster



General

Chain saws can be great labor-saving tools. But if not operated properly and with respect, they can quickly cause severe injury and death. At least two people died from injuries related to chain saws during the first week of cleanup after Hurricane Hugo. This leaflet cannot address every potential hazard you may encounter while using a chain saw. If you are not familiar with techniques of sawing, saw operation, or maintenance, read your owner's manual, consult a more detailed publication, or ask a dealer for more information.

Do You Need to Use a Chain Saw?

If you have only small branches (four inches or less), use a hand saw or axe. Chain saws are not suited for cutting such small branches. Owner's Manual

Read the owner's manual before operating a chain saw for the first time. Note the safety practices. Note how to check and adjust the chain tension. It's important for safe operation.

Personal Protective Equipment

One of the best safeguards against injury is wearing the proper protective equipment. This includes:

- safety glasses or goggles
- heavy-duty, non-slip gloves
- sturdy non-slip shoes
- hearing protection
- trim fitting clothes (not loose or ragged)
- long-sleeve shirt and pants (chaps if you have them)
- hardhat

Transporting the Saw

Put the chain guard on the saw when not in use. Always carry the saw at your side with the cutting bar and chain to the rear and to the outside. Never carry a chain saw in the passenger area of a vehicle. Fueling a Chain Saw

Use the fuel mix recommended by the manufacturer. Never fuel a hot chain saw; let it cool first. Always fuel in a clear area away from debris. If your fuel can has no spout, use a funnel. Wipe the saw clean of any spilled fuel after fueling. Never smoke while fueling.

Starting the Chain Saw

There is only one safe way to start a chain saw:

1. Move 10 feet or more away from the fueling area.
2. Place the saw in a clear, debris-free area.
3. Hold the saw firmly on the ground by putting your foot through the rear handle (if possible) and by holding it down with one hand on the top handle. Pull the starter cord with the other hand. The chain should not be moving while the saw is idling.
4. Never start the saw while holding it off the ground, or by "drop starting" it.

Preparing to Cut

Clear away anything that has a chance of interfering with the operation. Remove debris that could cause you to slip or lose your balance or accidentally contact the chain. Keep both hands firmly on the saw when cutting.

Avoiding Kickback

Kickback occurs when the saw rotates back, or "kicks back" at the operator, due to the nose of the saw contacting an object or obstruction. To prevent kickback:

1. Use a saw equipped with chain brake or kickback guard.
2. Hold the saw firmly with both hands. Grip the top handle by putting the thumb around it.
3. Watch for twigs that can snag the chain.
4. Don't pinch the chain while cutting the log.
5. Saw with the lower part of the bar close to the bumper, not on the top near the nose.
6. Maintain high saw speed when entering or leaving a cut.
7. Keep the chain sharp.
8. Do not reach above your shoulder to cut. The chain is too close to your face in this position.

Fatigue

Many injuries occur because the operator got tired or withstood long periods of saw vibration. Take frequent breaks.

Felling, Limbing, and Bucking

Cutting down large trees is not simple and should be left to experienced operators who have felled trees before. Limbing requires proper position and consideration of kickback potential, the springing back of branches, and the chance the log will roll. Bucking (cutting a log into lengths) requires knowing how to block the log to prevent binding, kickback, and rolling. If you are not familiar with these operations, get more information from your owner's manual, a saw dealer, a book or video, or from an experienced operator.

Based on information developed by Clemson Cooperative Extension following Hurricane Hugo. Revised for Virginia audiences by Virginia Cooperative Extension.

For more information, contact your local office of Virginia Cooperative Extension.

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