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## Woodlot Management: Working Safely in the Woods<sup>1</sup>

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One of the joys for many landowners of owning and managing woodlands is working in the woodlot. For these owners, doing their own road and skidtrail location, timber stand improvement, thinning, planting, wildlife habitat enhancement, and, in some cases, even their own harvesting, are an integral part of woodland ownership.

Just as with any other business or farm operation, safety on-the-job in the woodlot is an important consideration. It is important to note that chain saw accidents, alone, account for some 15,000 injuries annually in the U.S. Working safely in the woods should be a concern for all woodland owners, regardless of the extent or degree to which they do their own management activities. Ideally, working safely in the woodlot should become both necessary and second nature.

The following is a guide or checklist for working safely in the woods. Much of it is common sense, and most of the items are simple and easy to do; but they all lead to safer and more pleasant work experiences in the woods:

1. Carefully plan all activities.
2. Notify someone of your plans: where you plan to be, when, what you are doing, when you plan to return.
3. Carry a first aid kit; if not with or on you, at least in your vehicle.
4. Wear appropriate clothing for the task at hand:
  - a. dress warmly in cold temperatures; layering when necessary;
  - b. wear cool clothing in hot temperatures;
  - c. wear proper or loose-fitting clothing to allow for ease of movement for certain activities such as walking or loading;
  - d. wear tighter-fitting clothing when working with certain machinery, such as chain saws;
  - e. use appropriate protective clothing, again depending on the task.
5. In tick country be knowledgeable about lyme disease and aware of the steps to avoid problems, including repellents.
6. If you know you have allergic reactions to bee stings, carry a sting treatment kit with you; and *carry it with you into the woods, dont leave it behind in your vehicle.*
7. Be aware of any other venomous insects or animals in your area, be able to recognize them, and know what to do if stung or bitten.
8. Avoid dehydration and heat prostration; know the symptoms and how to treat them; always take and drink plenty of water.
9. Stay alert; *think*; take rest/water breaks frequently.

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10. Pack nutritious lunches/snacks for long work days; combined with nos. 8 and 9 above, helps fight fatigue, which is a factor in many accidents.
11. Properly maintain all equipment and tools, keeping sharp tools sharp, since they work better that way; proper maintenance assures better efficiency, production and lowers accident potential.
12. Acquire and use the proper safety equipment for the task at hand: hardhats, ear protection, eye protection, gloves, boots and steel-toed boots, chaps and other protective clothing when using a chain saw.
13. Select and use a chain saw that has all the current and modern safety features such as a chain brake, hand guard, chain catcher, safety chain, and vibration-absorbing handle.
14. Avoid heavy woods work in inclement weather.

15. Do not drink alcoholic beverages when working in the woods.
16. Plan ahead: in event of an accident know where the closest possible assistance is located.

Working in the woods can certainly be satisfying and rewarding for woodland owners. Just remember to always work safely in the woods, and that planning and common-sense are key.

Before undertaking any activity in the woods, it is also advisable to first discuss it with your professional forester.

So for you landowners who are able and so-inclined, have at it! And work safely!