



Maine Farm Safety Program

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Safety in Christmas Tree Production

Growing, maintaining and harvesting Christmas trees can be a dangerous job. Equipment involved in this work has the potential to injure those working with it. Planting, applying fertilizer, shearing, cutting and baling need to be carried out carefully and safely.

Planting and Caring for Christmas Trees

Use caution when planting and caring for Christmas trees. Use ear plugs around equipment, and make sure it is properly maintained. Do not wear loose clothing. When applying fertilizer, lift the bags properly. If they are beyond your lifting capacity, get help.

Shearing Christmas Trees

In managing a Christmas tree operation, shearing Christmas trees is one of the most important cultural

activities for the grower. Regardless of the species, shearing is necessary to attain and maintain the proper and desired Christmas tree shape.

The nature of the work and frequent need for training new workers makes shearing potentially one of the most accident-prone operations in Christmas tree production. To minimize these occurrences, growers should always strive to work safely during shearing operations. Stress safety when hiring and training workers for shearing.

Safety in Christmas Tree Production

- **Keep cutting tools sharp and wear protective clothing when shearing.**
- **Use care when cutting and felling Christmas trees.**

Shearing

Use the tool with which you are most comfortable. Keep all cutting tools sharp. Either touch them up periodically throughout the work day to maintain a sharp cutting edge, or have several tools available and exchange periodically for a sharper one. Minimize the pitch buildup on cutting tools by periodically removing it or exchanging for a clean tool.

Avoid reaching into and holding a branch or top to be cut with your free hand and cutting it with hand clippers held in the other hand. It is an easy way to cut yourself. What to do with your free hand is a problem when using a knife or clippers. Wear a protective glove on your off hand. When using a knife, install a loop of cord or leather large enough to wear over the wrist through the knife handle. Wear it over the wrist when shearing.

Carry a sharpening steel or some other similar rod or stick 12 to 18 inches long when using knives. This will help to avoid reaching into the tree or holding branches with the free hand while shearing.

Wear the proper protective clothing. Wear protective chaps or plastic leg or shin guards when shearing with knives. Use steel-toed boots for protection and ankle support. Wear the right-sized gloves to protect the hands when using knives. (For more information see the fact sheet entitled "Choosing Safe Clothing for Farm Work," #2309.

Learn and practice the correct cutting stroke when using knives to minimize arm, wrist and hand fatigue and injury. Use a cutting stroke that moves down and away from your body. Shear the tree in a forward motion, going around the tree with the knife ahead of your body. There is often too much debris to be walking backwards in the field, especially with a knife in your hands.

There are some other general rules to follow. Watch out for other workers when harvesting. Keep track of your hand tools. They tend to get lost when put down in tall grass. Some producers mark equipment with fluorescent paint. Allow no horsing around or rough housing. Use a knife with a hook or a pole pruner when necessary to reach the tops of tall trees. Always have someone hold the stepladder. Stay alert when shearing. Watch for such things as holes and bee or wasp nests.

Take the necessary precautions to ensure your safety. Have first aid equipment available in the field with you. Carry a bee sting treatment kit with you if you are allergic to insect stings. Watch out for poison ivy. Take the necessary precautions to avoid contracting lyme disease. Avoid dehydration when working in heat and direct sunshine. Bring and drink plenty of water. Take breaks often to minimize fatigue. Schedule shearing as early in the day as possible to take advantage of cooler temperatures.



Cutting

When cutting Christmas trees, work safely with the cutting tools involved. If using a chain saw, make sure it is in safe working order and the user has been trained to operate it correctly. If using an axe or hand saw, make sure the blade is sharp and it is used with caution. Watch out for falling trees.

Baling

When preparing trees for transport, a baler is usually used. It is important to know how to properly operate the machine. Follow the manufacturer's instructions for set up and usage. If the baler gets clogged with a tree, shut off the power to the baler before trying to release the clog. When the baler is unclogged, power can be restored and

work continued. Use care not to catch the twine of baled trees on buttons. Wear gloves of the proper size. They tend to get caught on baler cable and baler twine when handling trees.

Working safely is important in all aspects of Christmas tree production. While shearing, cutting and baling are operations that have a high potential for accidents, proper planning, precautions, training and common sense can minimize potential problems.

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This Maine Farm Safety fact sheet is part of an educational fact sheet series produced by University of Maine Cooperative Extension. For more information on farm safety, contact your county Extension office.

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