

Chainsaw Injuries

Hospital emergency rooms see approximately 30,000 catastrophic injuries from chainsaws each year. There is usually an uptick in injuries after natural disasters such as tornados or heavy storms because people attempt to remove damaged tree branches. The chain on a chainsaw can move up to 60 mph, which is much faster than an operator can react to prevent an injury. Chainsaw accidents can happen quickly, so it is important to take proper precautions to prevent injuries.

Kickback

One of the most common chainsaw injuries is caused by kickback. This occurs when the user loses control of the chainsaw because the tip of the blade hit an object or because the wood closed and pinched the chain. This causes the blade to either push up or move straight back toward the operator. The following steps can help prevent kickback injuries:

- Set up the worksite to avoid accidental contact with other objects during cutting.
- Use proper cutting methods to avoid touching the tip or pinching the blade.
- Use chainsaws that have an anti-kickback device installed on the tip of the blade.
- Use a chain brake that stops the chain immediately if a kickback occurs.
- Use chains with depth gauges and guard links that prevent the tip from digging deep into wood.

Personal Protective Equipment

Personal protective equipment (PPE) provides a potentially lifesaving barrier between the operator and the blade. Hardhats can protect against falling branches, and safety glasses and a face shield can protect the chainsaw operator from flying debris. Most chainsaw injuries occur to the back of the left hand and the left leg. Gloves with a good gripping surface should be worn to protect hands and help maintain control of the saw. Chaps with Kevlar fi-

bers that cover the leg and ankle as well as boots with Kevlar in them can help protect against leg injuries. Also avoid wearing loose clothing or anything else (e.g., jewelry, long hair) that could become caught in the teeth of the blade.

Controlling a Chainsaw

Before using a chainsaw the operator should read the user manual and take advantage of any classroom or hands on training offered. Use the following tips to help maintain control of the chainsaw.

- Don't "drop-start" a saw – place it level on the ground and use both hands to start it.
- ALWAYS use both hands gripped firmly on the chainsaw.
- Keep your right hand on the rear handle and wrap your left hand over the front handle.
- Hold the chainsaw down and to the side to keep your body out of the cutting plane.
- Clear the work area of trip hazards and stagger your feet securely while you work.
- Don't cut over your head or while standing on a ladder.
- Keep the chainsaw clean and in good working order.
- Sharpen the teeth and keep the chain lubricated and under proper tension for the best and safest cuts.

What This Means for Counties

Road and bridge crews and other county maintenance workers may use chainsaws as a routine part of their jobs. Everyone who uses a chainsaw should be trained on proper use and wear appropriate PPE. Jobsite safety is everyone's responsibility. For more information, contact CTSI at 303 861 0507. www.ctsi.org