



ARCHDIOCESE OF INDIANAPOLIS

Safety and Loss Control News

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Prepared by Gallagher Bassett Services, Inc.

Safety Tips for Using Power Mowers and Hedge Trimmers

Lawn mower and trimmer accidents account for thousands of injuries during the summer months. Many of these injuries happen to children and the majority of the injuries are severe including amputations and puncture wounds.

Lawn Mowers

Pulling the mower back over your feet is one of the most common accidents associated with lawn mowers. Feet and toes are the body parts most frequently injured by lawn mowers because in most cases, the person who is mowing loses his balance.

Another hazardous practice is mowing when the grass is wet. This produces two hazards: slipping on wet grass and clogging up the machine, which makes frequent stops necessary. The proper way to clean a clogged chute is to turn off the mower, disconnect the spark plug or electric cord and be sure the blade has stopped rotating before inserting a stick to clear it.

However, not all lawn mower injuries come from the blade. Filling a hot engine with gas can cause an explosion and a hot exhaust pipe can cause burns.

Mowers also tend to pick up objects and throw them. Objects thrown by a mower account for nearly half of the injuries and many cause permanent damage to the eyes. Since you cannot be sure that every stone, wire or stick is picked up, ask other persons to leave the yard when you are mowing and *always wear eye protection such as safety glasses or goggles.*

Learning to mow on inclines is important, but

few people are aware of how to do it properly.

When using a walk-behind mower on a hill, always mow horizontally so the mower will not roll back over your feet. If you are using a riding mower, mow up and down to lessen the chance of it tipping over. Also, never take a passenger on a riding mower. Many children have fallen off into the path of the blades. Never back up the mower without looking. The noise of a rider mower often drowns out a voice.

The force of a lawn mower blade can be illustrated by the following example: "A 3.5 pound, 26 inch blade which rotates at 3,000 rpm is equivalent in energy to a 21 pound weight dropped 100 feet, which is three times the muzzle energy of a .357 magnum pistol. The blade's velocity is 232 mph."

Trimmers

Accidents involving hedge trimmers commonly occur when changing positions while trimming; holding branches away from the cutter; or failing to wait for the blades to stop after turning the trimmer off.

Other hazardous practices include leaning from a ladder beyond comfortable reach; cutting in tight spaces; or using cutters with frayed or damaged cords. Having clippers out where children can use them, taping safety switches to the "on" position and overriding the automatic cutoff, and using clippers that are too heavy to control are also dangerous practices. Avoiding these could reduce the number of cuts and amputations that result from careless handling of hedge trimmers.

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Back Safety and Health Awareness

It is estimated that back strain injuries result in over 100 million lost work days each year. The direct and indirect costs of back injuries range from \$25 to \$65 billion. Back problems affect nearly 80% of all people at some time during their lives.

The side of these statistics that is often overlooked is the drastic effect back injuries can have on a person's lifestyle. Realistically we use our backs 24 hours a day, every time we lift, stand, walk, sit or even lie down. When the back is seriously injured, it not only changes what we do at work, but it can also seriously change our personal lives as well. Simple wear and tear can lead to a back problem, but the chances of having a serious injury increase greatly with poor posture, being overweight, and using poor lifting techniques.

Not surprisingly, the chance for serious back injury is greater in jobs that require more strength and heavy lifting. Also, the more often a person lifts a maximum load, the greater their chances of incurring a lower back injury. The surprising news however, is that a person's age, sex, body weight and stature are not always accurate indicators of strength. A person's past level of fitness is also not related to their present potential for injuring their back.

We all lift and move things everyday. In many instances, it is not lifting a large, heavy object that triggers the serious injury. The potential for back injuries can be cumulative, meaning the result of small, perhaps unnoticeable injuries that have been inflicted on the back over many years.

Dangerous Tasks

The tasks that can contribute to back injury include:

- Heavy lifting
- Repetitive motions
- Bending, reaching or stretching
- Twisting or rotating the trunk
- Maintaining unnatural body position
- Infrequent rest periods
- Insecure footing
- Insufficient lighting
- Temperature extremes

The potential for back injuries can be prevented by redesigning or eliminating the task, using good body mechanics and practicing common sense lifting.

Good Body Mechanics

Good body mechanics means using your body to do jobs and tasks in a way that keeps your back in balance. There are several simple things listed below that you can do to keep your back in a balanced/neutral position.



The potential for back injuries can be cumulative, meaning the result of small, perhaps unnoticeable injuries that have been inflicted on the back over many years.

Standing: For jobs that require long periods of standing, keep your spine in balance by placing one foot on a low stool. Raising one foot off the floor takes pressure off of your back and allows the back to assume a balanced position. *(Note: this is the same principle as the foot rail or small step in front of stand-up bars and tables in taverns and restaurants.)*

Twisting: Twisting your back should be avoided, even if you are not lifting or carrying anything. Twisting is the second most frequent movement associated with back injury (whether sitting or standing) and is particularly hazardous when carrying a load. Move your feet (rather than twist your back) to keep the load in straight alignment with your spine.

Sitting: For jobs that require a great deal of sitting, choose a chair that supports your lower back or add a support such as a pillow or rolled up towel. The chair should be adjusted so that your knees are slightly above hip level. For driving, use a rolled up towel for lower back support and adjust the seat so your knees are above hip level.

If your chair does not give adequate lower back support (such as a stool), lean forward and rest your upper body weight lightly on your arms and elbows.

Sleeping: Your back still needs support while sleeping. Try using a firm mattress and sleep on your side with your knees bent. If you must sleep on your back, put a pillow under your knees to relieve stress on your lower back.

Practicing Common Sense Lifting

Lifting a load safely is essentially a matter of common sense. Think about what you are going to do and the best way to do it.

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Eliminate the Task: If you do not have to move it, don't. If it must be moved, try to use available carts, dollies and other mechanical equipment that will eliminate the need for you to lift or carry the load.

Test the Load: Before attempting to move the load, test it to make sure you can move it safely. Can the load be split in half? It may be easier and safer to make two, smaller carries than struggle with one large load. If the load can not be split and you cannot move it safely by yourself, get help or use mechanical assistance, such as a hand truck, cart, dolly, etc. If you are using a cart, try to push rather than pull the load.

Plan the Move: Look over the path you plan to travel with the load. Is it clear and unobstructed? Is the walking surface slippery? Is the lighting good? If it is a long carry distance, where can you stop to rest? A slip or fall while carrying even a small load could lead to a serious back injury. If you are moving the load with someone else, rehearse the lift so there are no mistakes.

Prepare: If you are stiff, cold, etc., prepare for the lift by doing some simple stretching. This is particularly important if you are not in "good" physical condition or do not lift on a regular basis. Also, check the load for good hand holds. If you lose your grip while lifting or carrying, it could pull your back out of balance.

Keep it Close: When lifting, carrying or lowering, keep the load close to your body.

Don't Jerk the Load: When lifting or lowering, make a steady lift with a balanced foot stance. Do not jerk the load as this may pull your back out of balance. Try to use your stronger leg muscles to do the lifting. A steady lift is the best lift.

Be Comfortable: Carry the load in the most comfortable and strongest position between your shoulder and knuckle height (the height your hands are from the floor when they are at your side).

Take it Easy: If you must make repetitive lifts, take it easy, particularly if you are not used to this type of work. Repetitive lifting is closely associated with many back injuries. Take a break or perform other tasks to break up a series of repetitive lifts. If you have bad knees that prevent you from using your leg muscles, you might support the lift by using a chair or table as a brace. This allows you to use your arm strength to help you "push off" when you lift the load.

Conclusion

A serious back injury doesn't affect just you, it also affects your job, your leisure time and your relationship with those you care for. We owe it to ourselves and our families to do what we can to protect them and us from a potential tragedy. Back injury avoidance is simply a matter of taking the time to make sure you are capable of doing the task or lift. This means taking reasonable care of your back, using common sense and proper lifting techniques. The good news is that maintaining a healthy back is not as hard as you might think.



Eye Protection Reminders...

Always wear eye protection when using outdoor power equipment!

When completing yard work or when using power tools such as lawn mowers, weed whackers, edgers, pruning equipment or tractors, protective eye goggles/glasses or face shields should be worn at all times to protect against eye injuries from flying debris or common landscaping chemicals.

Make sure eye protection fits correctly!

Employees/volunteers are less likely to wear eye protection that does not fit well or is not comfortable. Have eyewear fitted by an eye care professional or someone trained to do this. Proper fit considerations include:

- The biggest gaps are usually near the corners of the glasses.
- The bigger the gap the more exposure to hazards coming in from a slight angle from above or below.
- Glasses that are not snug against the face also create larger gaps in protection.
- Some safety glasses are made in different sizes to fit different face shapes. Different styles may fit one person better than another.
- The use of adjustable temples and eyewear retainers or straps help hold the glasses in the proper position close to the face.

Source: <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/eye/toolbox-eye.html>

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If there are any subjects you would like to see addressed in this newsletter, or questions about a topic presented, please contact Ms. Amanda Weller, Gallagher Bassett Services, Inc., Two Pierce Place, Itasca, IL 60143, Telephone: 815-236-5170, Email: Amanda_Weller@gbtpa.com.

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Recap

Serious injury can be prevented by utilizing the following safety tips when mowing the lawn.

- Remove debris from lawns or grounds before mowing.
- Wear sturdy shoes and safety glasses while mowing.
- Never tip the mower while it is running.
- Disconnect the spark plug when working on the underside of the mower.
- Add gasoline only when the mower is stopped and cooled.
- Use U.L. approved safety cans for storage of gasoline.
- When operating a power mower, never allow extra riders on the mower.
- Never use electric mowers on wet grass.
- Use only a heavy duty, properly grounded extension cord with electric mowers or other electric tools.

Pass these tips on to anyone who will be cutting grass, whether it is an employee of the parish or a volunteer.

