

Spring into safe yard work

By Kathleen Misovic, associate editor

Warm weather brings people out into their backyards in droves to mow the lawn and trim shrubbery and trees. Often they are so intent on restoring their winter-neglected yards, they forget to protect themselves.

Statistics from Underwriters Laboratories Inc., Northbrook, IL, show that emergency rooms treat approximately 87,000 lawn mower injuries and approximately 88,000 power saw injuries each year, according to Sylvia Johnson, UL spokesperson. Avoid becoming one of these statistics by approaching yard work with caution.

Mow with caution

Mowing the lawn is one of the most common yard work chores, and also one of the most hazardous. Your feet are very close to the lawnmower blade, so make sure you wear closed toe shoes, preferably made of leather. "I see people all the time who mow the lawn in flip-flops and sandals, even barefoot," said Sam Steel, an agricultural safety specialist for the National Safety Council. "They don't realize how dangerous it is."

Common lawnmower hazards include eye injuries from an object, such as a rock or stick, thrown up from under the mower in the face, so be sure to wear safety goggles, Steel advised. Hand injuries also are common and occur when people stick their fingers into the mower chute to clear a clog. Make sure you turn off the mower before you attempt any repairs.

UL offers additional lawnmower safety tips:

- If you have a gasoline-powered mower, store the gas in a UL-listed safety can. Fill the mower outside, away from possible ignition sources.
- If you have an electric mower, do not use it on wet grass. Use an extension cord designed for outdoor use.
- Never leave an operating lawn mower unattended. Curious children, eager to help, may get seriously injured.

Trim your injuries

Hedge power trimmers do the job quicker than regular clippers, but can be riskier if you don't use them properly. "Many of them don't have good guards and you can easily cut yourself," Steel said.

Wear leather work gloves to protect your hands from cuts and safety goggles to protect your eyes from flying debris, Steel advised. If you're using the trimmers while on a ladder, don't reach too far — you may upset your balance. "If the hedge you're trimming is too high, you may want to hire the job out and save yourself from injuries," Steel said.

UL offers the following tips on using power trimmers:

- Before using the trimmers for the first time, read the owner's manual.
- Inspect the trimmers for frayed power cords or cracked or broken casings each time before you use them.
- Never alter the trimmers or remove safety features such as blade guards.

Saw in safety

Thinking of renting a chainsaw to cut down a tree? Chainsaws are easy to rent, but can be difficult to use safely. "If you're not familiar with a chainsaw

or any other power tool, don't leave the rental tool outlet until you receive training," Steel said.

Chainsaws produce a lot of sawdust that can fly into your eyes, so be sure to wear safety goggles, Steel said. They're also loud enough to damage your hearing, so wear earmuffs or ear plugs. Other necessary safety clothing includes long pants, a long-sleeved dress shirt and leather work gloves.

If you don't use the saw properly, you may experience kickback, which occurs when the blade jams or binds in the wood and throws the saw toward the operator. To avoid kickback, always wait for the saw blade to stop before pulling away from a cut.

Follow these other chainsaw safety tips from UL:

- Make sure the power switch is in the "off" position before plugging in a saw.
- While operating the saw, keep the cord away from the cutting area and position it so that it will not be caught on the work piece.
- Immediately discard saw blades that are chipped, bent, or damaged in any way.
- When finished with your task, make sure the saw is unplugged and the blade has stopped moving before you clean around the area.

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