



**American
Red Cross**

Fact Sheet: Using A Chain Saw Safely

Here are some helpful tips on using a chain saw to clean up debris after a storm.

The chain saw is a time saving and efficient power tool. However, it can be unforgiving and lethal, causing injury or death in the hands of a uninformed and unaware operator. It is not the chain saw causing the accidents or injuries, but the environment in which they are used. (According to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, there were more than 33,000 chain saw related injuries in 1998.)

******* *Read your safety manual that came with your Chain Saw* *******

1. If you are going to help clear tree and wood debris, you should wear at least:
 - A Helmet System (consisting of Head, Face and Hearing Protection),
 - Cotton or leather gloves,
 - Chain saw protective chaps or chain saw protective pants (UL Listed)
 - A pair of chain saw protective work boots w/steel toes.

These are required by OSHA reg. 1910.266 for all employed chain saw operators.

These products can be found at your local chain saw dealer.

2. Make sure that your chain saw has these features, and that the features are working:
 - Chain brake (manual or inertia)
 - Chain catcher
 - Working safety throttle switch
 - Working on / off Switch
 - Spark arrester
3. Make sure your chain saw carburetor is properly adjusted. (This should be done by a trained servicing dealer.) A misadjusted carburetor will cause stalling or poor performance and could cause the operator to be injured.
4. Fill a gas-powered chain saw when the engine is cool. If the saw is out of gas, let it cool 30 minutes before refueling. Do not smoke when refueling the saw! And use a chain saw outdoors only.
5. Have several commercially sharpened saw chains to match your chain saw and bar. **THIS IS VERY IMPORTANT!** You can immediately dull a chain saw chain by hitting the ground with the tip, or cutting dirty wood, hitting a rock or nails. It is very tiring to cut with a dull chain and the extra pressure you apply to the chain saw to cut faster will only increase your chance of an injury!



6. Look out for Hazards!
 - Broken or hanging branches, attached vines, or a dead tree that is leaning. All of these hazards can cause the chain saw operator to be injured.
 - If you have to cut a dead tree, be very careful! The top could break off and kill you.
 - If the tree is broken and under pressure, make sure you know which way the pressure is going. If not sure, make small cuts to release some of the pressure before cutting up the section.
 - Be careful of young trees that other trees have fallen on. They act like spring poles and may propel the chain saw back into your leg. (Many professional loggers have been hurt in this manner.)
7. Felling a dangerous broken tree should be left to a professional cutter. A downed tree may weigh several tons and easily injure or kill an unaware chain saw operator. More injuries occur during clean up after a hurricane than during the storm.
8. Carry the chain saw with the engine stopped.
9. When bucking up (cutting) a downed tree, place a plastic wedge into the cut to keep your chain saw from binding up. They are available at any chain saw dealer and sometime come packaged with the saw.
10. Never cut when tired or alone. Most woodcutting accidents occur late in the afternoon when most people are pushing to finish up for the day. Always work with a partner but never around children or pets.
11. Use a chain saw from ground level only, not on a ladder or in a tree.
12. When felling a tree keep everyone at least “two tree lengths away”.
13. You should have a preplanned escape route at a 45^o angle from the projected direction of a falling tree. Make sure there is nothing that could trip or stop you from making a quick retreat.
14. Read your owner’s manual concerning kickback. To reduce the risk of kickback injury:
 - Use a reduced kickback bar, low kickback chain and chain brake.
 - Avoid contact of bar tip with any object.
 - Hold the chain saw firmly with both hands.
 - Do not over-reach.
 - Do not cut above shoulder height.
 - Check chain brake frequently.
 - Follow sharpening and maintenance instruction for the chain saw.
15. When picking up heavy wood debris, get several helpers. Bend your knees and lift with your legs, not your back. A 24" log may weigh over 100 lbs.

Cleaning up tree damage after a storm is a very demanding job. If you follow these basic tips you can avoid injuries.

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