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Do You Have Safety Tips For Operating My Chain Saw?

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A weekly question/answer column

Do You Have Safety Tips For Operating My Chain Saw?

Jill Webster, Ph.D., and S. Christian Mariger answer:*

Although there are over a hundred causes of chainsaw injuries and deaths, by far the most common cause is kickback. This occurs when the cutting teeth on the chain, or the chain itself, catches or binds in the cut. Because the chain is moving at very high speeds, if the chain or teeth strikes a hard substance or gets pinched in the cut, the whole saw will move with great force. Controlling the saw becomes impossible and it can strike the operator. Most saws in service today have safety features such as chain brakes, safety chains and deadman switches; however, these improvements on their own are not enough to ensure the safety of the operator. To avoid kickback injuries you should:

- Avoid cutting with the tip or upper quarter of the bar.
- Use a top guard that covers the end of the bar.
- Operate the saw in the correct cutting position. Stand at an angle to the saw so that if a kickback were to occur the saw would miss your head and neck.
- Keep both hands on the saw while cutting. Keep your left elbow stiff. This will help prevent the saw from striking you if it were to kick back.
- Don't use a chainsaw to cut wood from old buildings, unless you are absolutely sure that all nails, screws or other metal objects have been removed.
- Know your saw. Take time to read your owners manual. Learn your saw's capabilities and limitations, and maintain your saw for performance and safety.

By strictly observing these practices, chainsaw operators can expect a sharp reduction in the risk of injury or death due to kickback.

* Jill Webster, Ph.D., and S. Christian Mariger, graduate assistant, Utah State University Agricultural Systems, Technology and Education Department