Provide workers with and/or ensure they wear the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) for each power tool they use. This often includes safety goggles, gloves, steel-toed boots, chaps, hearing protection, and sometimes respiratory protection. As part of your safety program, write down the PPE employees are required to wear when using specific tools and make sure employees have access to this information.

- Leg lacerations are common in our industry for workers using electric or gas-powered shears or hedge trimmers. Workers’ arms begin to tire after using these tools for an extended period, and the natural tendency is to lower them to the side or front of the thighs while taking a breather. Having employees wear chain saw chaps can prevent the blades from getting caught in their pants and cutting their legs.

- Train employees in the proper use of all tools. They should be able to recognize hazards associated with different tools and know the necessary safety precautions to take. Have the manufacturers’ operating instructions for each tool available to employees.

- Protect employees using electric tools from electrical shocks by ensuring tools have a three-wire cord with a ground and are plugged into a grounded receptacle, are double insulated, or are powered by a low-voltage isolation transformer. Electrical shocks can lead to fatal heart failure, burns, and falls from elevated surfaces.

- Make sure power tools are fitted with manufacturer-approved guards and safety switches. Exposed moving parts of power tools, including belts, gears, shafts, pulleys, sprockets, drums, flywheels, chains, and other reciprocating or rotating parts, must be guarded. Portable circular saws with blades greater than 2 inches in diameter must be equipped with an upper guard that covers the entire blade. A retractable lower guard should cover the teeth of the saw, except where it makes contact with the work material. This guard should automatically return to the covering position when removed from the work surface.

- Make sure the following tools are equipped with a constant-pressure switch or control that turns off power when pressure is released: drills; grinders with wheels more than 2 inches in diameter; chain saws; tappers; fastener drivers; reciprocating saws; saber saws, scroll saws, and jigsaws with blade shanks greater than ¼ inch wide; and similar tools. These tools also can be equipped with a “lock-on” control if it allows the worker to shut off the control in a single motion using the same finger or fingers.

- Inspect and maintain tools regularly to ensure they are in good condition.

- Consider phasing out older equipment and replacing it with ergonomically friendly versions now on the market. Many chain saws, line trimmers, brush cutters, shears, and blowers include anti-vibration systems and are ergonomically designed to reduce fatigue and the likelihood of chronic medical problems. Many new tools also are quieter, lighter, and emit less pollution.

- Rotate employees among different tasks and allow rest periods to improve ergonomics.

In the landscaping industry, handheld power tools, such as hedge trimmers, shears, line trimmers, leaf blowers, chain saws, and the saws, drills, etc. used in hardscape construction, are such a common part of daily life that many people forget about the hazards they pose. Unfortunately, it often takes the occurrence of a serious accident before a company takes steps to identify and mitigate these hazards.

Safety considerations associated with handheld power tools are numerous. They include, but are not limited to, personal protective equipment, ergonomics, electrical safety, fuel-handling safety, proper guarding, correct application, and workers’ awareness of their surroundings. Federal OSHA Standard 1926.302 deals solely with power-operated hand tools. OSHA Standards 1910.242 and 1926.300-305 and ANSI Z133 contain additional regulations and guidelines regarding these tools. Find the OSHA standards by doing a search for their numbers at osha.gov. Also, at least 24 states have OSHA-approved state plans and have adopted their own standards and enforcement policies. Check with your state agency to learn what additional rules might apply.

OSHA advises employers and employees to work together in establishing safe procedures regarding handheld power tools. If an employee encounters a hazardous situation, he or she should bring it to the immediate attention of a supervisor. Management should create an environment in which employees are encouraged to do this. 

EMPLOYERS AND SUPERVISORS

- Provide workers with and/or ensure they wear the appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) for each power tool they use. This often includes safety goggles, gloves, steel-toed boots, chaps, hearing protection, and sometimes respiratory protection. As part of your safety program, write down the PPE employees are required to wear when using specific tools and make sure employees have access to this information.

- Leg lacerations are common in our industry for workers using electric or gas-powered shears or hedge trimmers. Workers’ arms begin to tire after using these tools for an extended period, and the natural tendency is to lower them to the side or front of the thighs while taking a breather. Having employees wear chain saw chaps can prevent the blades from getting caught in their pants and cutting their legs.

- Train employees in the proper use of all tools. They should be able to recognize hazards associated with different tools and know the necessary safety precautions to take. Have the manufacturers’ operating instructions for each tool available to employees.

- Protect employees using electric tools from electrical shocks by ensuring tools have a three-wire cord with a ground and are plugged into a grounded receptacle, are double insulated, or are powered by a low-voltage isolation transformer. Electrical shocks can lead to fatal heart failure, burns, and falls from elevated surfaces.

- Make sure power tools are fitted with manufacturer-approved guards and safety switches. Exposed moving parts of power tools, including belts, gears, shafts, pulleys, sprockets, drums, flywheels, chains,
Use the right tool for the job.
Keep people not involved in the work at a safe distance from the area.
Know what PPE your company requires for each power tool you use and wear it.
Operate tools according to manufacturers' and your employer's guidelines.
Keep cords away from heat, oil, sharp edges, and cutting surfaces of power saws or drills.
Disconnect tools when you aren't using them, before servicing them, and when changing accessories such as blades or bits.
Store power tools in a dry place.
Keep work areas well-lighted and the floor or ground as clean and dry as possible to prevent slips or trips with or around power tools.
Ensure cords from electric tools don’t present a tripping hazard.
Remove all damaged tools from use and tag them, “Do Not Use.”
Maintain good footing and balance. Wearing sturdy work boots can help with this.
Handle, transport, and store fuel for power tools only in approved flammable liquid containers.
Be aware of your surroundings and the position of the power tool in relation to your body. Be careful not to relax your arms in a way that brings cutting edges of shears, trimmers, chain saws, or other tools in contact with your legs.

Use a damaged tool or improperly operating tool. Examine each tool before use and report problems to a supervisor.
Carry a tool by the cord or yank the cord to disconnect it from a receptacle.
Place your fingers on the switch button while carrying a powered tool.
Use power tools in damp or wet locations, unless they are approved for that purpose.
Remove safety guards or override any safety controls or switches.
Use an adapter or other means to plug a three-pronged cord into a two-hole receptacle. The third prong is a grounding conductor that protects you from electric shock.
Leave a fuel-powered tool’s engine running while filling its tank with fuel before the engine has cooled. This can cause vapors from the fuel to ignite.
Ignore ergonomics. If a tool is equipped with a shoulder strap, adjust the strap to the best fit for you. Wear anti-vibration gloves. Do some stretches during scheduled breaks and also take micro-breaks - 20 - to 30-second pauses in which you stop performing tasks and stretch. Do this about every 15 minutes, especially if the task is repetitive. Practice neutral posture, which is the body’s natural stance. When standing in neutral posture, a straight line could be drawn from the ear through the shoulder, hip, knee, and ankle. Also try varying your body position while doing work that is repetitive.
Make sure you follow federal OSHA standards as well as any state or local regulations related to the use of handheld power tools and equipment, including chain saws. Federal OSHA Standards 1910.242 and 1926.300-305 contain guidelines regarding these tools. Find the OSHA standards by doing a search for their numbers at osha.gov.

• Ensure workers wear appropriate clothing and provide-and make sure they wear—the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE). When operating chain saws, workers should wear thick pants or jeans, long-sleeved shirts, heavy-duty, abrasion-resistant gloves, chain saw chaps, chain saw-protective boots with steel toes, hard hats, face shields, and hearing protection (or a helmet system consisting of head, face, and hearing protection). 

• Never allow an employee to operate a chain saw unless he or she has been fully trained. Training should include safe operating procedures for the particular model the employee will be using as well as information on potential hazards of chain saw use. Train workers to recognize potential “kickback” situations (which occur when the tip of the saw’s guide bar comes in contact with a solid object and abruptly kicks back toward the operator) and to deal with or avoid them.

• Supply workers with chains saws that have been approved by the Underwriters Laboratory (UL) or another nationally recognized testing laboratory. Gasoline-powered chain saws must be equipped with a protective device that minimizes chain saw kickback.

• Remember, you are responsible for the safe condition of the tools and equipment your employees use. Ensure saw chains are kept sharp and maintenance procedures in owner’s manuals are followed.

• Allow workers to take breaks as needed and alternate chores that require gripping tools with those that don’t and strenuous tasks with lighter-duty ones. This will reduce the chances of fatigue-related injuries, such as an employee cutting his thigh when he lowers his arms to rest them while holding a chain saw.

Approximately 36,000 people per year are treated in U.S. emergency rooms for chain saw-related injuries, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Records from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission show the average injury requires 110 stitches and medical costs averaged $12,000 per injury in 2000. Workmen’s comp costs for chain saw injuries in the United States total an estimated $125 million per year. These costs don’t include lost productivity and quality of life for injured workers.

In the landscaping and horticultural services industry, cuts, lacerations, and punctures are the second most common type of injury reported annually, according to the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s Office of Statistical Analysis. Many of these accidents involve chain saws.

Cuts, amputations, and other chain saw-related injuries can be prevented through proper employee training and careful adherence to safety guidelines.
Know that a moment’s inattention or one quick, poor decision could cause a chain saw injury that results in the loss of a leg, arm, toes, other body parts—or even a life.

Wear the right clothing and PPE. This includes thick pants or jeans, a long-sleeved shirt, heavy-duty, abrasion-resistant gloves, chain saw chaps, chain-saw-protective boots with steel toes, a hard hat, face shield, and hearing protection (or a helmet system consisting of head, face, and hearing protection).

Read the manufacturer’s operating instructions before using any chain saw. These are in a manual your employer should provide.

Check controls and handles to ensure they are functioning properly and adjusted according to the manufacturer’s instructions.

Make sure the chain is sharp, chain tension is correct, the chain brake works, and the lubrication reservoir is full.

Clear the area of bystanders and pets before beginning chain saw work.

Remove dirt, debris, small tree limbs, and rocks from the saw’s chain path. Look for and remove nails, spikes, or other metal in objects before cutting.

When fueling a chain saw, use a funnel or flexible hose. Dispense fuel at least 10 feet away from any sources of ignition.

Start the saw on the ground or another firm support and with the chain’s brake engaged.

Keep both hands on the handles when operating a chain saw and maintain secure footing and balance.

Pay attention to your work and to the position of the chain saw in relation to your body at all times.

Know that one of the biggest hazards of chain saw work is “kickback.” Kickback occurs when the nose or tip of the saw’s guide bar comes in contact with a log, branch, or other solid object, then kicks up and back toward the operator. Reduce kickback risk by minimizing contact between the saw’s kickback corner and solid objects and by keeping a firm, proper grip on the saw’s handles.

Be on the lookout for branches under tension. They might spring out when cut.

Be aware chain saws can continue to run for five to 10 seconds after you switch them off. You could be cut if you immediately lower your arms and bring the chain in contact with your body.

Do:

- Operate a chain saw if you are ill or in poor physical condition.
- Wear loose-fitting clothing. It could get caught in the chain saw’s moving parts.
- Work alone.
- Drop-start a chain saw or start it against your chest.
- Operate a saw above your chest.
- Saw with the tip of the guide bar or remove tip guards.
- Operate a chain saw with one hand.
- Carry a chain saw without shutting it off and engaging its chain brake.
- Fuel a running or hot chain saw.
- Perform chain saw work when you are tired or even temporarily fatigued. Tell your supervisor you need to take a break.

Don’t:

- Operate a chain saw if you are ill or in poor physical condition.
- Wear loose-fitting clothing. It could get caught in the chain saw’s moving parts.
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- Carry a chain saw without shutting it off and engaging its chain brake.
- Fuel a running or hot chain saw.
- Perform chain saw work when you are tired or even temporarily fatigued. Tell your supervisor you need to take a break.
Leaf blowers are time-saving tools for cleaning leaves, grass clippings, fertilizer granules, and small debris from driveways, sidewalks, parking lots, and other lawn and landscape sites. Leaf blowers have largely replaced brooms, rakes, and water hoses for these tasks, and, according to most landscape industry estimates, cleaning a typical landscape site with a leaf blower is five times faster than using a rake and broom.

These power tools do, however, pose safety risks that are often overlooked. Leaf blowers can turn rocks, sticks, mulch, grass particles, pieces of glass, and other debris into projectiles that can cause cuts, lacerations, and eye injuries. Operators also are subject to hearing loss, ergonomics-related injuries, and electric shock.

Common safety-related mistakes include inattention, failure to wear the necessary personal protective equipment (PPE), and using leaf blowers for unintended purposes.

Employers and Supervisors:

- Comply with federal, state, and local regulations. Federal OSHA standards most likely to come into play in relation to leaf blowers are those associated with PPE, particularly hearing, eye, and respiratory protection, and with the General Duty Clause (for ergonomic and repetitive-stress hazards).
- Ensure employees wear the right clothing and appropriate PPE. For crew members operating leaf blowers, this usually includes pants and long sleeves, hearing protection (ear plugs or earmuffs), goggles or face shields, heavy-duty work gloves, sturdy work boots with nonslip soles and a respirator or dust mask, as appropriate, in dusty conditions.
- Provide newer, quieter leaf blowers, if possible. One average leaf blower produces 90–100 decibels of sound. Some newer machines are rated at or below 70 decibels at 50 feet and full throttle. **Federal OSHA requires a hearing-protection program for employees when noise exposures equal or exceed an eight-hour, time-weighted average sound level of 85 decibels.**
- Train crew members to operate the particular leaf-blower models they will be using.
- Instruct employees to inspect leaf blowers and wires, plugs, and extension cords before each use and bring damage/wear to your attention. Repair or replace damaged tools, wires, or plugs. Tag “DO NOT USE” until the repair can be made or the defective device is disposed of.
- Create a schedule that allows crew members to take frequent breaks from repetitive-motion tasks and rotate to other duties. Also, have them alternate between chores that require gripping tools with those that don’t.
- Provide backpack-style leaf blowers or equip/buy handheld leaf blowers with shoulder harnesses or straps - and make sure employees use them. These devices are very effective at preventing pulled and strained muscles and muscle fatigue.
- Make sure electric leaf blowers are plugged into ground-faulted outlets or are used with ground-fault-circuit interrupters.
- Provide fuel containers with self-closing lids and screen arrestors. These cans have spring-mounted spout caps that automatically open when vapor pressure builds up inside, preventing rupture or explosion. The mechanisms also cause the spout cap to close automatically if filling or pouring is finished or if the can is dropped. A wire-mesh flame arrester prevents flashbacks from reaching the liquid in the can.
Inspect leaf blowers and any wires, plugs, and extension cords before each use and bring damage/wear to your supervisor’s attention. Check the condition of the leaf blower muffler and air intakes (clear any debris) and air filter; check and tighten nuts, bolts, and screws and ensure controls, parts, and safety devices are not damaged and are working properly.

Wear all necessary PPE, which usually includes pants and long sleeves, hearing protection (ear plugs or earmuffs), goggles or a face shield, heavy-duty work gloves, sturdy work boots with nonslip soles, and a respirator or dust mask, if you are working in dusty conditions.

Clear the work area of bystanders, including other operators, and pets. People and animals should be at least 50 feet away.

Stop blowing if someone steps inside the 50-foot boundary.

Wet down dusty areas before using a leaf blower.

Start with the nozzle close to the ground and then raise it to a height where it does not generate dust.

Notice what you are moving. Practice moving grass clippings or a paper cup without moving dust.

Pay attention at all times. Never point the nozzle or blow debris toward people, pets, vehicles, or open windows or doors.

Use caution while working on steps.

Remove any loose debris (trash, tree limbs, rocks, etc.) before you start.

Wear the shoulder harness or strap on hand-held leaf blowers. Adjust the strap to the best fit for you. These devices are designed to take pressure off your back and arm and greatly reduce muscle fatigue and pulled muscles.

Keep your back straight while operating the leaf blower.

Use the correct fuel/oil mix. Check the operator’s manual for this.

Refuel before you start the engine. If you must refuel during work, turn off the engine and allow it to cool. Loosen the cap slowly to relieve pressure in the tank.

Start the leaf blower at least 10 feet from the fueling spot.

Make sure the spark-plug boot is secure to avoid sparks and possible ignition of fuel vapors.

Clean the leaf blower and remove debris from the air intakes after each use.

Operate a leaf blower until you have been trained to do so and fully understand the instructions and safety precautions.

Resist wearing hearing protection. You might not think you need it because hearing loss is gradual and often goes unnoticed.

Operate a leaf blower if you are tired, sick, have taken medication that impairs alertness or coordination, or have used drugs or alcohol.

Use an electric leaf blower in a wet area. Do not let extension cords drag through water when using them.

Modify a leaf blower in a way not authorized by the manufacturer.

Operate while standing on an unstable surface such as a ladder, rooftop, or in a tree.

Adjust or service the machine without first shutting it off and unplugging electric models.

Operate a leaf blower indoors or in a poorly ventilated area.

Move dusty materials with a leaf blower.

Use a leaf blower to clean up large amounts of gravel or gravel dust; construction dirt; plaster, cement, or concrete dust; or dry topsoil. Use a vacuum or power broom with water instead.

Spill fuel when refilling the machine. If you do spill, wipe the leaf blower dry before using it.

Smoke while handling fuel or operating the machine.

Leave the blower running when unattended.

Use a leaf blower to spread or mist fertilizers, chemicals, or other toxic substances.

Do

Don’t

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OPERATING POWERED AUGERS

KEY POINTS

- Conduct daily pre-task meetings to ensure employees are aware of the hazards associated with the job and the correct procedures to prevent accidents.
- Explain to the workers who will be operating augers the importance of inspecting the work area for hidden or exposed fabric and underground or overhead utilities.
- Permit only employees who are qualified by training and experience to operate equipment and machinery, including augers. Operators must receive adequate instruction regarding proper operation of the particular auger model he/she will be using before being allowed to operate it.
- Read each machine's operator manual and develop a comprehensive program for its safe operation. Such a program will include instructional requirements for operation, applicable OSHA requirements, local laws and regulations, job site safety, and an equipment maintenance program. Ensure each operator is fully instructed regarding the specifics of this safety program.
- Know-and ensure employees know-that if an auger contacts landscape or other synthetic fabric as it is drilling, the material could be drawn into the point of operation, causing any person standing on the fabric to be drawn in as well. Entanglements can happen so quickly there is no time for the operator to react.
- Explain to employees that if an auger engages a buried electric line, a high-voltage shock can be transmitted to the operator(s). Depending on the conductivity of the equipment and how well the operator(s) is(are) grounded, this shock can range from mild to fatal.
- If your company uses handheld augers, purchase models with handles fabricated from nonconductive, composite material. This material improves absorption of shock loads from the digging process and better insulates the operator(s) from electrical shocks.
- Be aware-and make sure employees are aware-that underground utility lines often run in close proximity to property lines, where your company might be asked to install plantings or fences for privacy. As with any other digging operation, ensure utility companies are notified and lines are marked before employees break ground in these areas.
- Ensure employees know that if an auger contacts a buried fuel or gas line, a deadly explosion could result.
- Remember that even if an underground utility strike doesn't result in injury-for instance, hitting a communication line, especially fiber optics-it will be an expensive mistake for your company.
- Tell employees they should never modify an auger machine in any way. Modifications can result in dangerous configurations leading to injury and/or property damage.
- Make sure operators are in proper physical and mental condition and are not under the influence of any substance (drugs, alcohol, etc.) that might impair vision, dexterity, or judgment.
- Do not allow an employee to operate a handheld, powered auger unless he/she is tall enough that the operator handles remain below his/her shoulder sockets.
- Be aware that prolonged use of handheld, powered augers and similar machines used in our industry exposes operators to vibrations that could produce White Finger disease (Raynaud’s phenomenon). This phenomenon reduces the hand's ability to feel and regulate temperature, produces numbness and burning sensations, and may cause nerve and circulation damage. To reduce workers' risk for this condition, rotate them among tasks and regularly monitor users' hands and fingers. If symptoms appear, encourage them to seek medical advice.
- Ensure workers wear appropriate clothing and personal protective equipment (see Employee Dos and Don'ts below).

EMPLOYERS AND SUPERVISORS

- According to the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s Integrated Management Information System, at least 13 fatalities have occurred from entanglement or crushing hazards involving augers since 1987. A number of fatal accidents also have resulted from contact with underground and overhead utility lines. Prompted by a fatal accident in which a worker, standing on landscape fabric, was drawn into an auger’s point of operation, federal OSHA issued a “Hazards of Auger Drilling” Safety and Information Bulletin in April 2008. A man using a truck-mounted auger to install the final post of a security fence in an area covered by landscape fabric and mulch was pulled into the rotating auger by the hidden fabric. Potential for this kind of accident is particularly high in our industry.
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Do

- Visually inspect the auger machine, auger, auger extension, and accessories for damaged, worn, or loose parts prior to operation.
- Determine that operator controls work freely, and all safety devices are in place.
- Know how the controls operate and how to stop the engine quickly in an emergency. If you have not received detailed training in the operation of the specific auger machine you are asked to use, do not operate it.
- Inspect the area where you will use the auger machine for landscape fabric and other obstacles and note the location of overhead utility lines.
- If landscape fabric is present, cut a hole in it sufficiently larger than the diameter of the auger to prevent contact or entanglement with the fabric.
- Ensure all utility companies have been notified and underground lines have been marked.
- Start the engine according to the operator’s manual to minimize the possibility of unexpected or uncontrolled auger rotation.
- Keep all body parts, clothing, and foreign objects clear of the rotating auger and/or auger extensions.
- Monitor the condition of your hands and fingers if you use handheld, powered augers and/or other handheld power tools frequently. After each use, exercise to restore normal blood circulation. If any White Finger disease (Raynaud’s phenomenon) symptoms appear (reduced ability to feel and regulate temperature, numbness, burning sensations), seek medical advice immediately.
- When operating an auger mounted to equipment or a vehicle, sit or stand at the operator’s station while operating the auger.
- Make sure your clothing is sturdy and snug fitting but allows complete freedom of movement.
- Wear pants; heavy-duty, nonslip gloves; a hard hat; and sturdy, steel-toed boots with nonslip soles.
- Wear hearing and eye protection while operating or when near operating auger machines.
- Keep shoes properly laced.
- Always hold the machine firmly with both hands when using a handheld, powered auger. Ensure the operator handles and gripping areas are in good condition and free of moisture, pitch, oil, or grease.
- Exercise special care in slippery conditions and on uneven surfaces. Watch for cracks, high spots, and other surface irregularities, and maintain proper footing and balance at all times.

EMPLOYEE DOS AND DON’TS

Don’t

- Modify the operator’s station or disable safety controls (hold-to-run or seat switch controls, for example).
- Allow bystanders, co-workers or animals in the area where the auger is in use, and, when possible, remove property that could be damaged. Flying particles can be emitted at high velocity, leading to injury and property damage. Except for the operator, crew members should not be near the auger when it is operating.
- Wear loose-fitting jackets, scarves, neckties, jewelry, flared or cuffed pants, or anything that could become caught on controls or moving parts.
- Operate a handheld, powered auger machine if you have any condition that might be aggravated by strenuous work.
- Operate a handheld, powered auger if the operator handles are higher than your shoulder sockets.
- Move or remove spoil-pile while the auger is operating. Remain a safe distance (a minimum of 10 feet) from the auger when helping the operator.
- Operate an auger machine in a location where kickback forces generated during the hole digging process can allow body parts to come in contact with a vertical wall, foundation, or other support-type structure.
- Operate an auger machine when/where visibility and light are not adequate for the job.
- Leave an auger machine running unattended.
- Neglect to stop the engine between each hole. Allowing the engine to remain operating between each hole substantially increases the potential for injury and property damage.
- Fail to take breaks as required to maintain physical and mental alertness when operating handheld augers. Use of these machines is strenuous and causes fatigue.