



Training notes from the woods & the classroom

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Chainsaw Operator Safety

By Lee Schauman

As spring breakup approaches, it's time to relax and refresh for another round of whatever and however we do our jobs. During this breakup, some of us might consider taking small private jobs which might require us to go back to the chainsaw, or if we are chainsaw operators, consider small jobs but might not approach it with the intensity we might have otherwise. To familiarize ourselves with being a "safe" chainsaw operator, let's consider some ideas to help us get there.

When we begin to operate our chainsaws on the jobsite, there are many things we must identify in order to consider ourselves "safe" operators.

First, let's talk about preparing and maintaining our physical condition. Ergonomics must be a major consideration in reducing or eliminating muscle/joint strains and injury. Let's take a look at some of the things that are considered critical to maintaining our muscular/skeletal health:

1. A quick regiment of muscle stretching before work will do wonders as to how we feel as we begin the day. Stretch back and leg muscles – the two muscle groups that are most likely to be injured during the physical requirements of operating a chainsaw.
2. When operating the saw, always position your body close to your work –don't reach or stretch with the saw – and always have good footing BEFORE starting the cutting process.
3. When lifting heavy objects – lift with your legs while keeping your back straight and behind/above your knees. Bending at the waist to lift heavy objects will absolutely lead to serious back muscle injury.
4. When lifting and moving objects from one area to another, don't twist your back, move your feet and keep your load close to your body so you can use your entire body to lift and move loads.
5. When loads are too heavy for you, get help – many injuries occur when we lift more than we're capable of. This is especially true for operators that bunch their wood for the skidder operators.
6. Eating properly and keeping physically fit will always help prevent injuries on the jobsite. Get plenty of rest and stay away from alcohol and drugs to keep you alert and sharp all day long.

Keeping all of these things in mind and practicing them as we approach an extremely physical job will help reduce or eliminate many of the injuries created by NOT practicing them.

Once we have prepared ourselves physically and mentally, then we must also assess and prepare our jobsite to be sure we eliminate and/or recognize and avoid hazards that can otherwise get us in trouble. Here are some pointers to help us provide a safe jobsite:

1. Always know where the nearest health services are and have a cell phone and phone numbers close at hand of emergency services including clinics, hospitals, hazardous materials agencies, and local fire departments.
2. Always park vehicles facing out, and never block your exits with felled trees or parked equipment.
3. Establish immediate site safety by placing warning signs on roadsides notifying drivers, pedestrians or bystanders, or anyone else in the area that logging operations are in progress.
4. As you enter the worksite, identify workplace hazards such as dead or hanging trees, springpoles, widowmakers, terrain hazards, and blind areas that might be hidden by underbrush or felled treetops and mark them appropriately or remove them safely. (Hazardous trees should be removed to provide a safe environment but sometimes that process creates more of a hazard than it eliminates. In those circumstances, avoid these types of trees until proper tools, equipment and personnel are available to do it right)
5. If you are working around powerlines, the rule of thumb is to stay at least two hundred feet away from them. If logging has to be performed near powerlines, call the power company to get their advice and help before getting yourself in trouble.
6. Always know where the other members of your crew are. To be safe, a minimum distance of two tree lengths is required between you and other crew members.
7. Always have a cutting plan for every tree you cut. That includes 5 steps which are: identifying hazards, the lean in relationship to the direction of the fall, escape route, amount of hinge to be left to control the tree, and a cutting plan to get the tree to do what you want it to which would include proper notch, backcut and whether wedges would be required.
8. Always be aware of changing weather conditions, and when they get bad, it's time to call it "quits." Those conditions could include extreme cold, rain, lightening, windy, heavy snow, and extreme heat.
9. Know how to handle chemical or hazardous materials spills and/or contact. Always have a complete first aid kit on site. Get first aid training so you can help your crew members, or even yourself if no one else is available.

These are some of the most important aspects of having a safe working environment, but certainly is not a complete list. Using your knowledge of equipment, jobsite, and

environment and some common sense will certainly help make each of your work days more enjoyable and more importantly, more safe.

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Minnesota Logger Education Program
Dave Chura, Executive Director
301 W 1st Street; Suite 510
Duluth, MN 55802
218-722-5442 · dchura@mlep.org · www.mlep.org