



Hedge Trimmer Safety ACLP Safety & Tools Workshop

Four main areas of concern regarding safety when using hedge trimmers:

- 1) Operator safety
- 2) Proper use of equipment
- 3) Startup and operation
- 4) Transportation and storage

Overview:

Carelessness or not following the recommended safety practices is the most common cause of an accident when using power equipment.

Danger zone: All other humans and/or animals should not be within the danger zone at any time an operator is working. With standard hedge trimmers, the danger zone is 15 feet (4.5-5 meters) diameter around the working area. For longer shaft trimmers, the danger zone is 50 feet (15 meters) diameter around the working area.

- 1) Operator Safety-** the most important safety consideration for any activity
 - a. The operator should always be in good physical and mental health
 - b. Do not operate any equipment or machinery when under the influence of alcohol, medication or any substances that can impair vision, dexterity and/or judgment
 - c. Always read the safety and operator's manuals before operating any piece of equipment
 - d. Always shut the engine off when done or when moving from one area to another. Do not carry a running trimmer over any distances. The trimmer should be able to be stopped immediately by using the stop switch. A unit with a malfunctioning stop switch must not be used again until it is repaired. Label the unit as broken and have it repaired.
 - e. Personal protection
 - i. Clothes should be trim fitting; do not wear loose clothing
 1. Jackets should be zipped or snapped
 2. Shirts should be tucked into pants
 3. Long pants
 - ii. Sturdy shoes with non-skid soles
 - iii. Sturdy work gloves will not provide cut through protection from moving blades but will help to improve grip, reduce stress from vibration, and provide protection from cuts and scratches
 - iv. Wear protective coverings for long hair



- v. Always wear eye protection that meets current ANSI, (American National Standards Institute) Z87.1 should be stamped or printed somewhere on the protective eyewear. Prescription glasses may and should be worn under safety glasses, not in place of safety glasses.
- vi. Flip down safety shields may be worn over protective eyewear but not in place of protective eyewear. Flip down face shields are recommended:
 - 1. For over-head operations
 - 2. Extremely close quarters
 - 3. Where branches may swing back and hit you in the face
- vii. Disposable dust masks
- viii. OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) requires hearing protection for more than two hours of operation. Hearing damage can be reduced by use of either headset-type protectors or earplugs.
- f. Reynaud's Syndrome – in jobs involving vibration, operators may suffer from [vibration white finger](#). Continuous long-term vibration may cause loss of blood flow to the fingertips.
- g. Carpal Tunnel Syndrome – pressure build up in the wrist may press on nerves. The nine tendons that run through the carpal tunnel from your wrist into your hand may become swollen. *Swollen tenosynovium* is a condition that occurs when you use your hands over and over in the same way. Repetitive stress and strain causes your tendons to swell, putting excessive pressure on the median nerve. That's what's causing the tingling and numbness in your thumb, index and middle fingers.
- h. To avoid Reynaud's Syndrome and Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, keep wrists straight during operation. Take breaks at least every 45 minutes. Exercise and stretch hands and wrists. Reduce speed and force of equipment. If problem occurs, go see a doctor.

2) Proper Use of Equipment

- a. Basic hedge trimmer/clipper components:
 - i. Rear handle with ignition switch
 - ii. Throttle trigger and lock out
 - iii. Front handle and guard
 - iv. Engine housing
 - v. Choke lever
 - vi. Purge pump
 - vii. Muffler cover
 - viii. Fuel cap
 - ix. Spark plugs
 - x. Blades
- b. Never operate machinery without protective guards in place
- c. Always wear gloves
- d. Use proper tools when changing blades
- e. Always inspect blades before each use
- f. Make certain fasteners are properly tightened
- g. Do not attempt to cut with loose or over tightened blades
- h. Do not cut with damaged, dull blades
- i. Do not operate a unit in disrepair or with damaged or missing parts
- j. Fuel:



- i. Check for fuel leaks before starting the unit
- ii. The fuel tank cap should be tightened securely
- iii. Spark arrester screen should be in good condition
- iv. Do not operate with a loose or defective muffler
- v. When adding fuel, always follow operator's manual. Wipe up any spilled fuel immediately.
- vi. Add fuel only outdoors, never indoors
- vii. Use only approved safety container for fuel supply
- viii. Never use alternative or unapproved fuel
 1. Gasoline with high ethanol content will cause severe engine damage, poor performance and void your engine warranty
- ix. After use, loosen fuel cap slowly. Fuel in the tank may be under pressure because fuel vapors have expanded.
- x. After filling tank, move at least 10 feet away from refueling site before starting engine
- xi. Do not smoke or bring sparks or flame near the fuel supplies
- xii. Never refuel when the engine is hot
- xiii. Never add fuel to a running engine

3) Startup and Operating Safety

- a. Inspect the work area and surroundings. Remove any wire, metal objects, power lines fencing, or fence posts that may create a hazard. Check the ground surface for obstacles and trip hazards.
- b. Check and prepare for any uneven terrain
- c. Never start the engine indoors or in an area with poor ventilation. Engine exhaust contains carbon monoxide, a colorless, poisonous gas that can cause one to lose consciousness and kill one in minutes if breathed in.
- d. Operate unit outdoors only in plenty of fresh air
- e. Keep exhaust directed away from you at all times. Avoid fumes and prevent burns.
- f. Do not operate near wires, telephone cables or other hazards
- g. Starting procedures:
 - i. Never start unit when holding up above the ground, always use good support
 - ii. Lay unit down on clear surface
 - iii. Set controls for starting
 - iv. Hold firmly
 - v. Make certain blades are clear
 - vi. **Read and follow operator's manual!**
 - vii. Warm up unit as instructed
 - viii. If blades move at idle, do not use unit
 - ix. If the blade angle needs to be changed or adjusted, the unit must be turned off and placed on the ground



- x. Blades should not be dropped
- h. Operation:
 - i. Never operate the unit with only one hand
 - ii. Keep both hands on the handles
 - iii. Turn unit off before removing cut material
 - iv. Never have another person hold material while operator cuts it
 - v. Make certain engine is off before clearing a blade jam
 - vi. Never grip blades or edges
 - vii. If you lose your grip, let the unit drop to the ground and step away
 - viii. Make certain blades stop before setting unit down
 - ix. Stand firmly in place with both feet on the ground
 - x. Look for hazards
 - xi. Take extra caution around uneven areas, i. e. steps, walkways, edging, and curbs
 - xii. Do not over reach
 - xiii. Do not work from an off ground position. Working from a ladder is extremely dangerous.
 - xiv. Never cut towards yourself, always cut away from yourself
 - xv. Do not try to cut branches that are too thick or too big for the unit, if not easy to cut, use other equipment
 - xvi. Never use unit as a hammer, level, crowbar, or axe
 - xvii. If shaking or vibration starts, stop using unit immediately and turn off
 - xviii. Never cut plant material more than six inches in length
 - xix. Never set a running unit down, always shut the engine off first
 - xx. Keep blade teeth and exhaust away from your body

4) Transportation and Storage

- a. Place ignition in 'off' position
- b. Drain all fuel completely
- c. Start engine and use up any remaining fuel
- d. Never store unit with fuel in the tank
- e. Always disconnect and remove spark plug wire away from spark plug before you work on unit or leave it unattended

5) Storage

- a. Store in dry, dust free location
- b. Always store out of the reach of children
- c. Do not store where fuel fumes can accumulate or reach an open flame or spark

Summary: Safety always begins with the operator

- Always use extreme care when mixing or draining fuel
- Always wear recommended safety gear
- Keep bystanders away
- Be aware of hazards