

Lawn Care Safety Guarding

Spring rains and sunny days are here once again, meaning that the grass is growing and you will need to be getting out there to keep it under control. In addition to preparing your lawn mower or string trimmer with the proper maintenance for the long summer ahead, don't forget about safety guards both on yourself and on the equipment needed to ensure that you make it through the season unscathed.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

When it comes to the basics, there a number of types of Personal Protective Equipment that need to be considered when performing lawn care activities

- ✓ Lower Body Protection – Wear long pants and sturdy, non-slip boots to protect your legs and feet from objects that are thrown from the mower. Never wear sandals or tennis shoes, which can easily be severed if caught under the mower deck or in the trimmer's cutting swath.
- ✓ Face Protection – Safety glasses should be worn at all times unless operating equipment in an enclosed cab. In addition, if operating a string or a brush trimmer, a face shield should be used along with safety glasses to protect your face from flying debris.
- ✓ Hearing Protection – The average lawn mower produces noise of over 100 decibels, well above what OSHA considers to be safe for a worker to be exposed to for an 8-hour shift. Even if the work is short in duration, hearing protection should be used if any of the following applies:
 - o You have to raise your voice significantly to be heard by someone three feet away
 - o After finishing the work, your ears feel plugged or you hear a mild ringing or whooshing noise that goes away after an hour or two.

Generally speaking, typically two lines of defense should be used when operating any type of lawn mower. Both earplugs and earmuffs often must be worn at the same time to reduce sound levels to appropriate levels for the operator.

Equipment Guarding

In addition to protecting yourself, remember that certain guarding needs to be in-place on your tool to protect you from its moving parts. In general, you should always check the operator's manual for the location of guards and safety shields on the equipment that you are using and do a pre-start inspection to make sure that none of them have been removed or inactivated.

With push mowers there are a few different guards that need to be present:

- ✓ Chute Guard – In the area where the grass clippings are ejected, there typically is a plastic guard in-place. This is there to protect the operator from being able to get too close to the spinning blades underneath, and should never be removed.
- ✓ Rear Guard – This guard, which often drags behind the back of the mower deck, is also in-place to prevent exposure of the worker's feet to the spinning blades underneath. Additionally, it is there to protect the worker from rocks, glass, and other sharp debris that can be ejected from the rear of the mower.
- ✓ Safety Shut-Off – Often, this is a bar that must be held in conjunction with the push bar of the mower to keep it running. If released, the mower will automatically shut off. This shut-off must not be disabled by permanently holding it in-place so that the worker doesn't have to. In the case where the worker slips towards the mower in wet grass, for example, this safety device will be essential in shutting off the equipment before a foot or a hand can come into contact with the moving blade.



Riding mowers and string trimmers also have safety guards of their own. First with riding mowers, they, too, will have a discharge chute to protect the worker from getting anywhere near a spinning blade. This, however, should not be a possibility because riding mowers typically come equipped with a seat switch that will shut off the tractor if it senses that the rider has risen from the seat. As a general safety rule, workers should never dismount a tractor that continues to run, whether or not the blades are engaged. Many amputations and fatalities have occurred due to workers getting too close to a spinning blade or, even worse, getting in front of a machine that suddenly kicks into gear.

Finally, string trimmers typically will come with a guard just above the string or cutting blade. Since debris can fly in many directions as this type of device is operated, PPE as noted above should be worn by the worker and the necessary guarding must be left in-place on the trimmer itself.