

5 Essential Wood Chipper Safety Tips

There is no such thing as a 'minor accident' when dealing with chippers. Stay the HELL out of the hopper!

Material to be Chipped

Strive to feed small bits of debris into the chipper. Excessive size of wood and other material increases the risk of injuries. Blunt force trauma is a common incident associated with large bits of debris. The chipper blades move at an extremely high speed. The high speed may discharge bits of material that may land on you with severe impact. This can result in grave injuries. Always inspect the material to be chipped before you feed into the chipper. It should be free of stones, metal or other hard objects. These can easily cause a machine jam. They may also be discharged from the machine and cause injuries if they land on your body.

How to Feed the Chipper

Use a long twig or pole to feed material directly into the chipper. This will ensure that your hands are a safe distance away from the machine. Close contact with the machine increases the possibility of an accident. Be careful to avoid the feed chute area. A moment of distraction could find you get pulled into the machine. Feed leaves and smaller tree parts into the transport compartment.

Tuck Away all Clothing

Loose clothing can cause you to get jammed in the machine. Do not wear baggy clothes when you have to operate a chipper. Avoid cuffs that hang, jewelry items that dangle, loose belts or other items that have the potential to get caught in the machine. Should such a jam occur, you may be pulled into the machine and get strangled or crushed.

Wear Protective Items

You need to protect your eyes, ears, head and feet when at work with a shredder. Wear safety goggles and ear protection. The machine works at high speed and there's always the possibility that fine particles and debris will fly about. The goggles will keep bits of debris from your eyes. Ear plugs are helpful due to the high volume of noise while the machine is in operation. However, chippers with the clutch facility are generally quieter. You also need to wear a hard hat. This will protect your head from the impact of any flying splinters and debris. Wear steel toed safety boots for greater safety to your feet.

Clean as You Chip

Lots of debris will gather on the ground around the chipper. It is a good idea to clean up regularly while the chipper works. This will help to prevent slips and falls around the machine.

The following are recommended safe chipper work practices to reduce "caught-in" and "struck-by" hazards:

- Designate one or more employees as a safety watch to be stationed near emergency shut-off devices while other employees feed material into the chipper.
- Stand to the side of the infeed chute when feeding material into the chipper. This reduces the "caught-in" hazard and allows quick access to emergency stop devices.
- Keep hands and feet out of the immediate infeed chute area while the chipper is running.
- Push material into feed rollers with a wooden tool or a long branch.
- Feed branches into the chipper butt-end first.
- Place shorter branches on top of longer branches being fed into the chipper.
- Place small debris into trash cans instead of feeding it into the chipper.
- Never stand, sit or climb onto any part of the chipper while it is running.
- Shut down the chipper and remove the ignition key when it is unattended.
- Before starting a chipper, ensure that the chipper's disc hood is completely closed and latched, and that there are no foreign objects in the infeed area.
- Ensure that the discharge chute is positioned to prevent chips from hitting employees.
- Do not stand in front of the feed table when the chipper is running.
- Check material to be fed to ensure that it is free of metal and other foreign objects.
- Use proper locking pins to immobilize the disc cutting wheel when attempting to clear a clogged chipper chute or changing chipper blades.

Train Your Workers and Reinforce it Frequently!

Get training on safe work procedures based on chipper manufacturer recommendations. Know how to use the safety devices and controls, especially the emergency shutoff switch. Learn where the caught/crush points on the machine are, where to stand, and where to keep your hands and feet during operation. Learn how to open and close the hood, clear jams, and feed branches. Keep the chipper well maintained. Perform safety checks before each use to ensure safety devices work properly. Do not allow workers less than 18 years of age to operate a chipper.