



# Take 5

For Safety



U.S. ARMY COMBAT READINESS/SAFETY CENTER

4905 5th Ave. Fort Rucker, AL 36362-5363  
Comm. (334) 255-3770 Fax (334) 255-2266  
<https://safety.army.mil>

## Chain saws: cut your losses

**ART POWELL**  
Strategic Communication Directorate  
U.S. Army Combat Readiness/Safety Center  
Fort Rucker, Ala.

Now that cooler weather is upon us and the temptation to relax by a warm fireplace is high, many Soldiers might think about securing their own firewood for the long winter ahead. Anyone who's ever cut wood knows how effective and efficient a chain saw can be when compared to the backbreaking work of swinging an axe. Before you head into the woods, however, there are important safety considerations to keep in mind.

Chain saws are dangerous machines. They can be purchased and operated without training or licensing, and the risk of serious injury is very real for the unaware and unprepared. According to the University of Florida, about 40,000 Americans are injured each year while operating chain saws. Injuries require an average of 110 stitches to close and four weeks of recovery time to heal.

Most incidents are caused by kickback, when the teeth on the chain catch an object and send the blade flying backward. But chain saw accidents are largely preventable, especially when users wear proper personal protective equipment and follow safe operating procedures. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration offers the following tips for safe chain saw operation:

### Before starting a chain saw

- Check controls, chain tension and all bolts and handles to ensure they are functioning properly and are adjusted according to the manufacturer's specifications.
- Ensure the chain is sharp and the lubrication reservoir is full.
- Start the saw on the ground or another firm, supportive surface. Never drop start a chain saw.
- Start the saw at least 10 feet from the fueling area with the chain's brake engaged.

### Fueling a chain saw

- Use only containers approved by a nationally recognized testing laboratory when transporting fuel (glass containers are not approved for transport of fuel or fuel products).

- Dispense fuel at least 10 feet from potential sources of ignition. Never smoke during fueling or when handling gasoline-powered machinery.
- Use a funnel or flexible hose when pouring fuel into the saw.
- Never attempt to fuel a running or hot saw.

### **Chain saw safety**

- Clear away dirt, debris, small limbs, rocks and other obstructions from the chain's path. Look for nails, spikes and other metal objects in the tree before cutting.
- Shut off the saw or engage the chain brake when walking on rough or uneven terrain.
- Keep your hands on the saw's handles and maintain secure footing while operating the saw.
- Always wear proper personal protective equipment — hand, foot, leg, eye, face, hearing and head protection — when operating a chain saw. Ensure clothing fits close to the body and does not hang loose.
- Watch for branches under tension that may spring when cut. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, even a seemingly small branch can release with enough force to cause serious injury or death.
- Be cautious of saw kickback. To avoid kickback, never saw at the blade tip and keep the tip guard in place if the saw is equipped with one.
- Never cut branches that may fall onto overhead power lines. Contact the local utility company for assistance.

For more information on chain saw safety, visit [www.osha.gov](http://www.osha.gov).

