

Cut Down Lawn Mower Hazards

Sunny skies, flowers budding, trees blooming and birds chirping are all signs that Spring is in the air. But along with this new season comes that dreaded routine of mowing the lawn.

Whether you're doing this job yourself, or hiring a neighborhood youngster, you should be aware of the hazards that can result from careless use of power lawn mowers.

During the days of the simple hand mower, dangers of getting cut by the blade or receiving injuries from objects thrown by the mower were not very common. But with the convenience of the power mower come hazards that can and do accompany this burst of speed.

One man had to learn to recognize the dangers of using a power mower the hard way. While pushing his mower up a grassy slope, he slipped and fell, thrusting his left leg under the housing of his rotary mower. The fast-spinning blade cut off two toes and part of another.

A more serious accident occurred when a woman did not check her lawn carefully for debris before mowing. She pushed the mower over a piece of barbed wire that shot out the back of the machine and severed an artery in her leg. Unable to call for help, the woman bled to death.

But adults are not the only ones injured as a result of the careless use of a power mower. A 10-year-old boy was cutting the lawn on a riding mower when a tree branch knocked him off the machine. The mower ran over him and cut off his left arm.

In another incident, an 11-year-old girl was mowing a steep slope in her back yard when the mower overturned and crushed her to death.

And, a five-year-old girl had her left foot cut off when her six-year-old brother, driving a riding mower, ran over her.

You may think these accidents could never happen to you or your child. But last year an estimated 77,000 persons visited emergency rooms for lost fingers, toes and other extremities that were nicked, lacerated or amputated by power mowers. Thousands more were probably treated in doctors' offices for lesser injuries that went unreported.

For these very reasons the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) was formed in 1973 to save the public from these hazards. After nine years of changes and repeated extension of standard deadlines, the CPSC enacted a mandatory standard governing the safety of power mowers last spring.

Statistics show about 50 percent of the injuries from all mowers and 64 percent of the injuries to operators of walk-behind mowers occurred from blade contact.

With the new standards in effect, all types of mowers manufactured after June 30, 1982 must have certain safety features to protect the user from blade contact.

This standard requires:

- The mower must have a blade clutch, also called a "dead-man" handle control, which the operator must grip to keep the blade spinning.
- If the user has to release the blade clutch for any reason, the blade must stop spinning in three seconds.
- All new mowers must have a safety start. This will allow the operator to start the mower on the handle used to push the machine.

- The tip of the blade on the mower must be far enough from the perimeter of the deck to prevent contact with a person's foot if it were pushed under the deck.

The CPSC standard requires that design engineers determine if this would result in a larger diameter deck and a heavier and clumsier mower, or a shorter blade and a narrower cutting swath.

On many new mowers the trailing shield on the back of the mower protects the operator from flying debris and from the likelihood of operators trapping their feet under the mower.

According to local lawn mower dealers, these new safety requirements have added \$35 to \$45 to the cost of a new mower. This may sound like a lot, but it is a much smaller price to pay, compared to the price of losing a finger or a foot.

However, most people will be back to using their old standby tucked away in the garage. And, many of these mowers do not have the safety features added by manufacturers in recent years.

But these safety tips can get you on your way to better mowing times:

- Study your operator's manual to know the different functions of your mower.
- Make any adjustments to the mower before you begin to cut. And make sure the motor is not running.
- Remove all stones, wire and other objects from the area you are going to mow.
- Make sure children and other bystanders are away from the area you plan to mow.
- Never mow up and down a hill with a walk-behind mower. Always mow laterally to prevent slipping toward the mower.
- Never mow wet grass. It clogs up the motor and increases the chance of slipping.
- Never mow barefoot or in sneakers or sandals. Wear sturdy leather shoes or steel-toes to protect your feet as much as possible.
- When refueling, let the mower cool down first.

These tips cannot guarantee mowing protection. It's all up to you and your willingness to be safe!

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