

## Are you competent to operate a chainsaw safely?



The Health and Safety Authority (HSA) is concerned with the increased number of fatalities involving chainsaws at work. Over the last 5 years 12 persons have suffered a fatal accident arising from the use of chainsaws or tree felling work activities. The Teagasc National Farm Survey indicates that about 6.5% of all injuries, in the Agriculture & Forestry sector, are chainsaw or wood related indicating that approximately 120 serious injuries occur each year. Self-employed farmers, farm workers and contractors are particularly at risk. These persons may only use chainsaws occasionally and may lack the training, experience and knowledge required for certain tasks.

Chainsaw injuries involve cuts and lacerations to the limbs, neck, head and trunk. The major cause of timber related fatal accidents is being struck by falling trees or branches while felling trees. Appropriate training in chainsaw use and the wearing of suitable protective clothing to protect against these injuries is essential.

If you find you cannot meet the competency/training requirements or don't have all the personal protective equipment for chainsaw work activities, then you must engage the services of a competent chainsaw provider.

### Risk Assessment

You must complete a written risk assessment of the work to be completed prior to starting work. This should list the hazards that may cause harm and detail the control measures provided to ensure safety.

### Training in Safe Use of the Chainsaw

If you need to use a chainsaw to fell a tree and are not competent to do so safely, then you should have completed an accredited chainsaw training course and successfully completed the assessment suitable for the chainsaw work to be done.

For example a basic chainsaw course covering the felling of small trees will be up to 5 days in duration. Shorter courses which only cover chainsaw maintenance and cross cutting of felled timber are also available. Such short courses do not demonstrate the techniques required for felling trees safely. Therefore, you should discuss your particular training requirements with an accredited chainsaw training provider before undertaking the training.

Persons undergoing chainsaw training must be adequately supervised.

Farmers who wish to use a chainsaw for such tasks as clearing fallen branches and pruning trees to maintain clearance for machines on their land may not need to complete full certified chainsaw training but would be strongly advised to do so.

### Personal Protective Equipment

To protect against serious life threatening injuries it is very important that suitable protective clothing and equipment is worn when using a chainsaw, no matter how small the job. Modern personal protective equipment (PPE) is easy to wear, long lasting and could prevent death or serious long term injury. However PPE cannot provide complete protection against cuts from chainsaws. Using chainsaws also exposes operators to high

levels of noise and hand arm vibration which can lead to hearing loss and conditions such as vibration white finger. However it is important to understand that PPE doesn't protect you against falling trees. Chainsaw operators should refer to the manufacturer's handbook for safety instructions and advice.

The following safety equipment should be used:

- Safety Helmet (to conform to EN 397), suitable eye protection (Visor to EN 1731 or safety glasses to EN 166) and ear defenders (EN 352).
- Chainsaw gloves with protective pad on the back of the left hand, leg protection incorporating clogging material (EN 381-7).
- Safety boots with steel toecaps and a good grip (EN 381/345).
- Non-snag close-fitting outer clothing.
- Chainsaw trousers (EN 381-5).

No personal protective equipment can ensure 100% protection against cutting by a hand-held chainsaw.

**Note:** A first aid kit should be readily available, including large wound dressing.

## Summary

If you intend to operate a chainsaw at work you must ensure that;

- a risk assessment on the work to be done is carried out before commencing the work.
- you are competent or alternatively have successfully completed a chainsaw training course including an assessment which are suitable to the type of chainsaw work planned.
- you wear the Personal Protective Equipment necessary for chainsaw work activities.
- any person working for you in connection with chainsaw and tree felling work activities is also competent and wearing appropriate PPE.

Don't compromise on these essential safety requirements. Otherwise you may be at risk of a serious accident to yourself or others.

## Further information

1. Health and Safety Authority – [www.hsa.ie](http://www.hsa.ie)
  - To access the H.S.A. Guide to Safe Working with Timber and chainsaws, please click [here](#).
  - To access the Agriculture Code of Practice please click [here](#).
  - To access FAQs on Safety Statement and Risk Assessment click [here](#)