

MOWING



With the arrival of spring comes mowing season. Whether you operate a zero turn or other lawn mowing equipment, safety must be a top priority. More than 80,000 accidents are recorded annually from the use of lawn care equipment, and according to recent statistics lawn mower-related accidents result in 70 deaths per year in the U.S. From employee injuries to property damage due to flying debris, the costs associated with lawn mower-related incidents can be excessive.

Below are a few hazards to consider before operating a lawn mower:

- Lacerations and amputations as the result of body parts contacting mower blades
- Being struck by objects thrown by the mower
- Burns by contacting a hot muffler or engine components
- Fires caused by refueling while the engine is hot
- Noise-induced hearing loss
- Roll overs that pin the operator or cause contact with the mower's blades

Now that we understand some of the hazards, here are a few reminders to reduce the likelihood of injury and property damage.

1. Be familiar with and properly maintain the equipment.
 - Read, understand, and follow the manufacturer's recommendations for maintenance and safe operation.
 - A spring tune-up is in order. Inspect and service all lawn care equipment before use.
 - Provide training to ensure the equipment is safely operated.
 - Be aware of the mower's safety features, including how to stop the mower quickly in case of an emergency.
 - Test ride the machine and become familiar with the equipment before engaging the blade.
2. Know the area in which you are working.
 - Inspect and clear the work area of trash, debris, rocks, and other items that might be thrown by the mower. Keep safety devices and guards in place.
 - Note potential hazards such as holes or drop-off areas. Mark obstacles that can't be removed, such as sprinkler heads, with flags or cut grass around them with a line trimmer before mowing.
 - Watch for overhead obstacles. Survey the area for low-hanging limbs, wires, or other overhead hazards with which the operator may come in contact.
 - Choose the appropriate equipment when mowing inclines. Zero turn mowers should not be operated on slopes over 15 degrees.
 - Avoid using riding mowers near drop-offs or water hazards. A walk behind or line trimmer are a safer option to mow this area.

CASE STUDY

An employee was using ramps to load a zero-turn mower onto a trailer. Part way onto the trailer, the mower did a wheelie and flipped over on top of the employee. The employee was pinned under the mower for nearly 15 minutes and unable to breathe. The employee was killed due to compression from the weight of the mower.

https://www.osha.gov/ords/imis/accidentsearch.accident_detail?id=140829.015

CASE STUDY

The employee was mowing an incline along the pond using a zero turn sit down style mower, while a coworker on site was trimming. As the employee mowed the wet grass on a 17-degree incline, the mower slid into the pond and flipped onto the employee, trapping him under water. The coworker found the mower upside down with the operator pinned under the water. The coworker attempted rescue and called 911. The employee was not wearing his seat belt and the rollover protection system was not up. The employee died at the scene.

https://www.osha.gov/ords/imis/accidentsearch.accident_detail?id=100357.015

MOWING HAZARD ALERT

- Keep people and pets away from the work area. Children may not understand the dangers of the mower and the operator may not hear them approaching over the sound of the mower.
3. Protect yourself with appropriate personal protective equipment.
 - Wear appropriate clothing, including pants, a long-sleeved shirt, safety glasses or goggles, slip-resistant shoes, hearing protection, and reflective vests while working near roadways and sidewalks.
 - Wear heavy gloves and eye protection while changing or sharpening blades.
 - Avoid wearing loose clothing and jewelry that could become entangled in moving parts.
 4. Follow safe mowing practices.
 - Inspect mowers prior to each use. Examine the equipment for defects such as loose hardware, damaged parts, low tire pressure, or missing safety guards or devices. Report any problems to your supervisor and place the mower out of service until repairs are made.
 - Make sure the safety discharge chute and mower deck deflector shields are present and in a safe position. If the mower deck or chute becomes clogged, stop the engine and wait for all moving parts to stop. Never attempt to clear a clog while the blades are engaged or the engine is running.
 - Drive carefully. Make steady movements with a ride-on mower's control levers or steering wheel.
 - Follow manufacturers' recommendations for mowing slopes. Do not mow slopes in wet conditions due to potential loss of traction. Be mindful of traction concerns when driving across slopes and downhill.
 - Ensure the mower's rollover protection system (ROPS) is deployed and locked in place. If you must fold down the ROPS to avoid overhead obstacles, return it to its upright and locked position as soon as possible.
 - Always wear the seat belt when the ROPS system is engaged. Without a seat belt, the operator will not be confined to the protective zone created by the ROPS. Do not wear seat belts when the ROPS roll bar is down or on equipment without ROPS. If the seat belt is damaged or missing, do not operate until it is repaired.
 - Turn off the engine and let it cool before refueling. The nozzle should contact the rim of the tank while you add fuel. Never smoke or have an open flame near fuel.
 5. Use caution when loading, unloading, and transporting units on trailers or trucks.
 - Keep the roll bar in the raised and locked position and use the seat belt during the loading and unloading process.
 - A full width ramp extending beyond the rear tires is recommended instead of individual ramps for each side of the unit.
 - Avoid sudden acceleration when driving up a ramp and sudden deceleration when backing down a ramp. Both maneuvers can cause the unit to tip backward.
 - Do not attempt to turn on the ramp or trailer. You may lose control and drive off the side.

CASE STUDY

An employee was refueling his riding mower from a portable fuel container. The fuel ignited and exploded. The employee was transported to a local hospital where he later died from his burn injuries. The investigation revealed the employer did not train employees in safe fueling procedures including refueling only when the engine is turned off and cooled down.

https://www.osha.gov/ords/imis/accidentsearch.accident_detail?id=18675.015

CASE STUDY

A recently hired employee was using a gas-powered, flat-deck lawn mower for the first time. The employee had been working for the employer for six weeks and was not familiar with lawn mowers. When debris became clogged in the side discharge chute, the employee reached into the running mower chute to remove it. He lacerated his right middle finger and amputated the ring finger to the first joint.

https://www.osha.gov/ords/imis/accidentsearch.accident_detail?id=170840771



Questions? KLC is here to help!

Contact Aaron Parrish (left) at aparrish@klc.org or Gary Musgrave (right) at gmusgrave@klc.org with KLC Loss Control or call 800.876.4552. Visit klc.org for more information.