

# Safety Matters **Landscaping**

Provided by: Risk Management Advisors

## Operating Leaf Blowers

A leaf blower is a useful form of landscaping equipment that can help employees like you complete work tasks more efficiently—namely, moving yard debris such as leaves or grass cuttings from one area to another. But even though leaf blowers can make your job easier, this equipment can also create serious hazards.

Common safety concerns associated with leaf blower usage include the risk of injury from flying debris, overexertion issues from holding the blower in an awkward position for an extended period, prolonged noise exposure and burn hazards during the refueling process.

Nevertheless, many of these concerns can be addressed by taking proper precautions. You can help reduce your risk of injury while using a leaf blower at work by following these safeguards.

### Before You Begin

Prior to operating a leaf blower, utilize these safety preparation steps:

- Check that the leaf blower is the correct and safest form of equipment for the task at hand. Don't use a leaf blower to spread gravel, dirt, fertilizers, chemicals or other toxic substances. Always avoid using an electric leaf blower near wet areas, and never use any kind of leaf blower in poorly ventilated spaces.
- Make sure that your leaf blower is compliant with all relevant state and local laws. Keep in mind that gas-powered leaf blowers are illegal in certain cities and states. In addition, only operate a leaf blower in daylight.
- Ensure that you are in the right state of mind to operate a leaf blower. Never use a leaf blower if you are fatigued or under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Inspect the leaf blower and any attached wires, plugs or extension cords before each use for loose parts. Inform your supervisor if you notice any problems—never use damaged equipment.
- Remember to clear any remaining debris or dust from the air filter, check that the muffler is in good condition and ensure that the leaf blower has enough fuel (if using a gas-powered blower).
- Confirm that you have all the personal protective equipment (PPE) necessary for operating a leaf blower. This includes eye goggles or a face shield, heavy-duty gloves, nonslip boots, hearing protection and—if the work area contains dust, mold or animal droppings—a respirator. Ensure that you know how to use all PPE correctly.
- Wear full-length, well-fitting clothing to avoid exposing your skin to flying debris or getting your clothing tangled with the blower. Be sure to tie back long hair and remove any jewelry as well.



- Adjust the shoulder harness or strap on the leaf blower so that it fits comfortably and securely to your body. Doing so will help take pressure off of your arms and back, as well as reduce your risk of muscle strain.
- Prepare the area where you plan to use the leaf blower. Remove excess debris or waste in your path to avoid unintentional dispersal. Make sure all bystanders, animals and other employees are at least 50 feet away.
- Review all company safety policies, protocols and training resources regarding leaf blower usage. Ask questions if you don't understand something.

### While You Work

As you operate a leaf blower, keep these precautions in mind:

- If you are using a gas-powered leaf blower, start the blower at least 10 feet away from the fueling area.
- Always operate the leaf blower on steady, level ground. Avoid using a leaf blower while on an elevated surface, such as a ladder, tree or rooftop. If you must use a leaf blower on steps, use extreme caution.
- Keep the leaf blower nozzle as close to the ground as possible—avoid raising it above your head. Never point the nozzle toward people, animals, oncoming traffic or open windows and doors.
- Stay alert at all times. Stop the leaf blower immediately if your path becomes blocked, unexpected debris appears or anyone steps inside the 50-foot boundary.

- Maintain proper balance and solid footing, and keep your back as straight as possible while operating the leaf blower.
- Never leave the leaf blower unattended while it's still running. When you are finished with the leaf blower, clean the air filter and store it in a secure location.

### When Refueling

Gas-powered leaf blowers need to be periodically refueled. If your leaf blower requires refueling, use these safety tips:

- Refuel the leaf blower outdoors, close to the ground and away from any ignition sources. Allow the engine to cool before you refuel, and loosen the fuel cap slowly to relieve pressure in the tank.
- Be sure to use the correct fuel mixture and store the fuel in a safe, secure location.
- If you spill any fuel on the ground, clean it up immediately. Keep a spare set of clothing available in case you spill fuel on yourself and need to change.
- Pay close attention when filling the fuel tank—avoid overfilling it. When you are finished filling the tank, replace the fuel cap and tighten it securely.