

Safety Matters **Landscaping**

Provided by: Risk Management Advisors

Operating Push Lawn Mowers

Lawn mowers are essential to landscaping operations. Specifically, push mowers allow operators to walk behind the mower and steer it by utilizing an attached handle. But, while push mowers can make your job easier, they can also create serious hazards.

Common safety concerns associated with push mowers include the risk of injury from flying debris, getting struck by the blades, prolonged noise exposure, and burn or fire hazards.

However, many of these concerns can be addressed by taking proper precautions. You can help reduce your risk of injury while using a push mower at work by following these tips.

Before You Begin

Prior to operating a push mower, take these safety steps:

- Check that the push mower is the correct form of equipment for the task at hand. Also, only operate a mower in daylight.
- Never operate a push mower that you haven't been trained to use. Keep in mind that certain push mowers may have additional controls and hazards.
- Ensure that you are in the right state of mind to operate a push mower. Never use a mower if you are fatigued or under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Inspect the push mower before each use for loose parts and potential damage. Pay special attention to the motor, spark plug, nuts and bolts, blades, handle and safety devices (e.g., the kill switch). If you are using an electric push mower, be sure to inspect any associated cords, plugs or wires as well.

Inform your supervisor if you notice any problems—never use damaged equipment.

- Check that the push mower does not have any fluid leakage concerns or debris buildup (e.g., grass, leaves or grease). Repair any fluid leaks and clean off debris before use.
- Confirm that you have all the personal protective equipment (PPE) necessary for operating a push mower. This includes safety glasses, heavy-duty gloves, hearing protection and nonslip, steel-toe boots. Further, ensure that you know how to use all PPE correctly.
- Wear full-length, well-fitting clothing to avoid exposing your skin to debris or getting your clothing tangled in the mower. Tie back long hair and remove any jewelry as well.
- Prepare the area where you plan to use the push mower. Remove excess debris or objects in your path. Take note of potential hazards in the area and be sure that any people or animals are at a safe distance.
- Review all company safety policies, protocols and training resources regarding push mower usage. Ask questions if you don't understand something.

While You Work

As you operate a push mower, keep these precautions in mind:

- Ensure that the transmission is out of gear and the mower blade clutch has been disengaged before starting the engine.



- Always try to push the mower forward. Avoid pulling it backward unless absolutely necessary, as you are more likely to lose control of the mower this way. Never lift the mower off the ground while it's running.
- Try to keep the push mower on level ground as much as possible. Avoid using the mower near drop-offs, ditches and steep slopes. Consult the manufacturer's manual for the maximum slope height that your mower can handle. If you must use the mower on a slope, be sure to mow across the slope.
- Avoid sudden moves (e.g., abrupt stops, starts and sharp turns) when using the push mower. Keep a steady pace and slow down to make wide, gradual turns. Be especially cautious on wet grass.
- Stay alert at all times. Stop the push mower immediately if your path becomes blocked, unexpected debris appears or anyone gets too close to the mower. If you accidentally hit an object or the mower vibrates unusually, turn off the engine, disconnect the spark plug wire and make sure all moving parts have stopped before investigating the problem.
- Ensure that the mower chute is always facing away from other people, animals, buildings and nearby traffic.
- Never let go of the push mower handle while the engine is still running. When you're finished with the mower, stop it on level ground, turn off the engine, disconnect the spark plug wire and make sure all moving parts have stopped before letting go. From there, be sure to clean off any debris buildup before storing the mower in a safe, secure location.

When Refueling

Gas-powered push mowers require periodic refueling. When refueling a push mower, use these tips:

- Refuel the mower outdoors 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 approved fuel containers with nozzles. Store the fuel in a safe, secure location.
- Remember to touch the nozzle to the tank before removing the fuel cap to avoid a static spark from igniting the fuel.
- Keep the nozzle in close contact with the fuel tank to prevent spills. If you spill any fuel, 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.

Safety First

At , your safety is our top priority. By following these safeguards, you can help us mitigate hazards and prevent accidents. If you have any questions on push mower safety, talk to your supervisor.