

# Safety Matters **Landscaping**

Provided by: Risk Management Advisors

## Operating Riding Lawn Mowers

Lawn mowers are essential to landscaping operations. Specifically, riding mowers allow the operator to drive the mower from an attached seat and determine its direction with a steering wheel. But while riding mowers can make your job easier, they can also create serious hazards.

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

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

### Before You Begin

Prior to operating a riding mower, use these safety steps:

- Check that the riding mower is the correct form of equipment for the task at hand. Also, only operate a mower in daylight.
  - Never operate a mower that you have not been trained to use. Keep in mind that some riding mowers have may have additional controls or hazards.
  - Ensure that you are in the right state of mind to operate a riding mower. Never use a mower if you are fatigued or under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
  - Inspect the riding mower before each use for potential damages. Pay special attention to the motor, spark plug, steering wheel, nuts and bolts, seat belts, blades, tires and safety devices (e.g., the kill switch). Inform your supervisor if you notice any problems—never use damaged equipment.
- Check that the riding 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.
  - Commercial riding mowers usually have a rollover protection system (ROPS) in place to prevent rollover accidents. Make sure the ROPS is secured and in good condition.
  - Confirm that you have all the personal protective equipment (PPE) necessary for operating a riding 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 riding mower. Remove excess debris, objects or waste in your path. Take note of potential hazards in the area—such as elevation changes and blind spots. Be sure that any people or animals are at a safe distance.
  - Review all company safety policies, protocols and training resources regarding riding mower usage. Ask questions if you don't understand something.



### While You Work

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

- Sit facing forward in the mower seat and ensure your seat belt is securely fastened. Keep your hands and feet on the mower at all times.
- Ensure that the transmission is out of gear and the mower blade clutch has been disengaged before starting the engine.
- Try to keep the riding mower on level ground as much as possible. Avoid using the mower near drop-offs, ditches and steep slopes. Consult the manufacturer's manual on the maximum slope height that the mower can handle. If you must use the riding mower on a slope, always mow up and down the slope.
- Avoid sudden moves (e.g., abrupt stops, starts and sharp turns) when using the riding 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 riding 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, remove the key 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 dismount the riding mower while it's still running. When you're finished with the mower, stop it on level ground, turn off the

engine, remove the key and make sure all moving parts have stopped before dismounting. From there, be sure to clean off any debris buildup before storing the mower in a safe, secure location.

### When Refueling

When refueling a riding 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 riding mower safety, talk to your supervisor.