

Safety Matters **Landscaping**

Provided by: Risk Management Advisors

Operating String Trimmers

A string trimmer—also known as a weed wacker or weed whip—is commonly used in landscaping to cut, trim or remove small strips of grass, weeds and other low foliage. Even though this equipment can help make your job easier, it can also create serious hazards.

Common safety concerns associated with string trimmer usage include the risk of injury from flying debris, cuts or abrasions from close contact with the trimmer, muscle strain from holding the trimmer in an awkward position for an extended period, prolonged noise exposure, and burn or fire hazards while refueling.

Fortunately, these concerns can be addressed by taking proper precautions. You can help reduce your risk of injury while using a string trimmer at work by following these safeguards.

Before You Begin

Prior to operating a string trimmer, utilize these safety steps:

- Check that the string trimmer is the safest form of equipment for the task at hand.
- Ensure that you are in the right state of mind to operate a string trimmer. Never use a string trimmer if you are fatigued or under the influence of alcohol or drugs.
- Inspect the string trimmer before each use for loose parts and potential damage. Pay special attention to the trimmer line, engine, spark plug, air filter, bolts and screws. If you are using an electric string trimmer, be sure to inspect all cords, plugs and wires for potential hazards as well. Inform your supervisor if you notice any issues—never use damaged equipment.
- Make sure the trimmer's safety guard is fully intact and secured. The safety guard offers vital protection by preventing you from coming in contact with the trimmer line and deflecting debris away from you as you operate the trimmer.
- Check that the trimmer does not have any fluid leakage concerns or debris buildup in the trimmer line and air filter. Repair any fluid leaks and remove debris before use.
- Confirm that you have all the personal protective equipment (PPE) necessary for operating a string trimmer. This includes safety glasses or a face shield, anti-vibration gloves, hearing protection and nonslip 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 clothing caught in the trimmer. Tie back long hair and remove any jewelry as well.
- Adjust the shoulder harness or strap on the string trimmer 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 string trimmer. Remove excess debris, objects or waste in your path. Be sure that any people or animals are at a safe distance.



- Review all company safety policies, protocols and training resources regarding string trimmer usage. Ask questions if you don't understand something.

While You Work

As you operate a string trimmer, keep these precautions in mind:

- If you are using a gas-powered string trimmer, start the trimmer at least 10 feet away from the fueling area.
- Keep your hands and feet at a safe distance from the trimmer's moving parts. Never touch the trimmer line if it's still rotating.
- Always operate the string trimmer on steady ground. Avoid using a trimmer for any foliage above ground level (e.g., shrubs, trees or other large plants).
- Maintain proper balance and solid footing, and keep your back as straight as possible while operating the trimmer. Don't overreach.
- Stay alert at all times. Stop the string trimmer immediately if your path becomes blocked, unexpected debris appears or anyone gets too close to the trimmer. If the trimmer line becomes entangled with an object or material, turn off the engine, disconnect the spark plug wire and make sure all moving parts have stopped before investigating the problem.
- Never leave the string trimmer unattended while it's still running. When you're finished with the trimmer, turn off the engine and make sure all moving parts have stopped before letting go. From there, be sure to clean off any debris buildup and store the trimmer in a safe, secure location.

When Refueling

Gas-powered string trimmers need to be periodically refueled. If your string trimmer requires refueling, use these safety tips:

- Refuel the string trimmer outdoors, on 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 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 prevent 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.