



# Top-handled chainsaws



- the saw continues to run in its full range of working positions;
- the on/off switch is effective;
- the chain tension.

- 27 To hold the saw for a cold start, place the saw on the ground with the left hand on the front handle and right knee on the rear of the control handle. Apply the chain brake. Engage the starter mechanism and pull the starter cord firmly with the right hand. Release the half throttle mechanism as soon as the saw has started.
- 28 If conditions prevent a ground start, the saw can be started using the thigh start, but beware of excess heat if the saw has a side exhaust outlet. Alternatively, the saw can be started with the right hand on the control handle. Apply the chain brake, engage the starter mechanism and pull the starter cord firmly with the left hand.
- 29 Before restarting in the tree, make sure the saw chain is clear of obstructions such as climbing equipment, protective clothing or parts of the tree. Apply the chain brake. Start the saw either:
- by holding the front handle with the left hand and pulling the starter cord with the right hand; or
  - by holding the saw with the right hand on the control handle and pulling the starter cord with the left hand.

## Using the saw

- 30 Top-handled chainsaws have two handles. To maintain proper control of the saw you must, wherever possible, grip both handles.
- 31 **Poor work positioning in the tree is not an acceptable reason for one-handed use.**
- 32 Keep the saw well clear of yourself and your climbing equipment at all times. Ensure you obtain the best available cutting position to minimise the risk of being struck by the saw (including kickback) or by severed pieces of wood.
- 33 Incorrect, one-handed use significantly increases the risk of injury from the saw if it kicks back, skates or bounces on contact with a branch, or drops through at the end of a cut.
- 34 Never 'hold and cut' a section. Do not attempt to catch a falling section.
- 35 One-handed use should be restricted to circumstances where one hand is required to maintain a stable working position and the saw is used at extended reach with the other hand, eg while cutting at the extremities of limbs.
- 36 The chainsaw may be attached to the climber's harness by means of a strop. However, it should not be attached to the climber in situations where there is a risk of the chainsaw being trapped or taken with a severed section.
- 37 The chainsaw should be switched off, or the chain brake applied, after each cutting operation. Do not leave the engine running for long periods when not in use.

## Further reading

<i>Using petrol-driven chainsaws</i>	AFAG301
<i>Basic chainsaw felling and manual takedown</i>	AFAG302
<i>Chainsaw snedding</i>	AFAG303
<i>Chainsaw cross-cutting and manual stacking</i>	AFAG304
<i>Chainsaw clearance of windblow</i>	AFAG306
<i>Chainsaw felling of large trees</i>	AFAG307
<i>Use of winches in directional felling and takedown</i>	AFAG310
<i>Tree-climbing operations</i>	AFAG401
<i>Aerial tree rescue</i>	AFAG402
<i>Mobile elevating work platforms (MEWPs) for tree work</i>	AFAG403
<i>Emergency planning</i>	AFAG802
<i>Electricity at work: Forestry and arboriculture</i>	AFAG804
<i>First aid at work: Your questions answered</i>	INDG214
<i>Managing health and safety in forestry</i>	INDG294
<i>Chainsaws at work</i>	INDG317
<i>Protect your hearing or lose it!</i>	INDG363

These publications are available from HSE Books - see 'Further information'.

## Notes

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**This leaflet contains notes on good practice which are not compulsory but which you may find helpful in considering what you need to do.**

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## Introduction

This leaflet covers the safe working practices to be followed when using a petrol-powered top-handled chainsaw for arboricultural off-ground work. Tree work requiring the use of a chainsaw should be carried out only by a trained and competent climber who has experience in chainsaw use, or by a trainee under supervision who is competent using a chainsaw on the ground.

You can use this leaflet, along with the chainsaw manufacturer's handbook, as part of the risk assessment process to help identify the controls to put in place when using a top-handled chainsaw.

You must also assess the effect of the site and the weather as well as following this guidance.

### **Serious accidents and fatalities are caused by operators not observing good working practices with chainsaws in trees.**

All operators must have had appropriate training in how to operate the machine and how to carry out the tasks required (see HSE leaflet INDG317 *Chainsaws at work*).

### **Top-handled chainsaws are only suitable for use off the ground.**

### **Rear-handled saws must be used when working on the ground.**

This leaflet should be read in conjunction with AFAG leaflets 401 *Tree-climbing operations*, 402 *Aerial tree rescue*, 403 *Mobile elevating work platforms (MEWPs) for tree work*, 802 *Emergency planning and* 804 *Electricity at work: Forestry and arboriculture*

For guidance on work preparation see AFAG leaflet 302 *Basic felling by chainsaw and manual takedown*.

## Personal protective equipment (PPE)

- ❑ **1** While **no PPE can provide 100% protection against cuts from chainsaws**, the following should be used:
  - Safety helmet (rock-climbing helmet or protective helmet complying with EN 397).
  - Eye protection (mesh visor complying with EN 1731 or safety glasses to EN 166).
  - Hearing protection (complying with EN 352).
  - Leg protection\* incorporating all-round chain-clogging material (complying with EN 381-5, type 'C' design).
  - Protective boots\* with good grip and protective guarding at front vamp and instep (complying with EN 345-2).
  - Non-snap outer clothing. The use of high-visibility clothing may also be appropriate.
- ❑ **2** Each person should carry a personal first-aid kit including a large wound dressing (see HSE leaflet INDG214 *First aid at work: Your questions answered*).

\* The items marked with an asterisk should bear the chainsaw logo (see AFAG leaflet 301 *Using petrol-driven chainsaws*) and show the chain speed to which they have been tested.

- ❑ **3** Hand-cleaning material such as waterless skin cleanser or soap, water and paper towels should be readily available.

## The machine

- ❑ **4** Only use a chainsaw if:
  - the stop switch works and is clearly marked;
  - the front hand guard/chain brake, chain catcher and anti-vibration mounts are undamaged and functional;
  - the throttle opens only when the throttle lock is depressed;
  - it is fitted with a reduced kickback chain;
  - the exhaust system and silencer are in good order;
  - there is a suitable means for attaching a strop to the rear of the saw;
  - there is a mandatory hearing protection symbol on the saw.

## Preparing to work

- ❑ **5** Operators should not normally work alone.
- ❑ **6** Ensure that a risk assessment has been undertaken and the significant findings recorded. All workers involved in any operation on the worksite should be made aware of and comply with the controls identified.
- ❑ **7** A safe method of operation for the work to be done must be agreed to ensure that a safe working distance can be maintained between workers, and between workers and machinery (outside the risk zone of the machines being used).
- ❑ **8** Ensure that a designated and responsible person knows the daily work programme and agree with them a suitable emergency procedure. Where reasonably practicable use a two-way radio or mobile phone and a pre-arranged call-in system.
- ❑ **9** In case of emergency be able to provide the emergency services with adequate information, eg the grid reference, the distance from the main road, the type of access - suitable for car/four-wheel drive/emergency service vehicles. In urban areas, street names are essential. Know the location details before they are needed in an emergency.
- ❑ **10** On all reasonably foreseeable approaches to the worksite, erect warning and prohibition signs conforming to the Health and Safety (Safety Signs and Signals) Regulations 1996, indicating a hazardous worksite and that unauthorised access is prohibited. In areas of very high public access, the risk assessment may indicate that additional controls (eg barrier tape, barriers, extra manning) are required.
- ❑ **11** Check before starting work and periodically throughout the day that:
  - all external nuts, screws and fastenings are secure;
  - the chain tension is correct by pulling the chain fully round the guide bar in the running direction. Wear gloves or use a cloth;
  - the on-off switch is effective;

- the chain brake is effective;
- the chain is stationary when the saw is idling without the chain brake applied;
- the chain oiling system is effective.

## Maintenance

- ❑ **12** Ensure that maintenance is carried out as specified in the manufacturer's handbook.
- ❑ **13** Maintain equal cutter lengths, specified cutter angles and depth gauge profiles. Inspect the chain at each sharpening for abnormal wear patterns and damage.
- ❑ **14** Check the guide bar rails for cracks and distortion.
- ❑ **15** Check the drive sprocket periodically for excessive wear or damage.
- ❑ **16** Do not make any adjustments, other than to the carburettor, when the engine is running.
- ❑ **17** Inspect the anti-vibration rubbers frequently and replace as specified in the manufacturer's handbook.
- ❑ **18** Use only recommended non-flammable cleaner. Do not use petrol to clean any part of the machine.
- ❑ **19** Do not delay reporting any defects that may have occurred. If necessary, take the saw out of operational use. Replace faulty parts with manufacturer's recommended items.

## Fuelling

- ❑ **20** Petrol vapour is invisible and can travel considerable distances from spillage or fuelling sites. Maintain a safe distance from all sources of ignition at all times.
- ❑ **21** Store fuel to avoid vapour ignition from any sources such as fires, people smoking or the chainsaw. Select a site shaded from direct sunlight.
- ❑ **22** Use fuel containers specifically designed for chainsaw use that incorporate a non-spill spout. The containers must be clearly labelled and have securely fitting caps.
- ❑ **23** Replace all fuel and oil caps securely. Ensure the 'O' ring seals on the fuel and oil caps are in good condition.
- ❑ **24** Move a safe distance (normally at least 4 m) from the fuelling point before starting the chainsaw.

## Starting the saw

- ❑ **25** Maintain a safe working distance from other people at all times.
- ❑ **26** The saw should be started and warmed up and the following functions must be checked by groundstaff before being passed up to the climber:
  - the oil delivery to the chain;
  - the chain brake;
  - the chain is stationary when idle;

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