

THE PURDUE LANDSCAPE REPORT

Chainsaw Safety, PPE

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I have lost count of the number of times I've witnessed people working with chainsaws in shorts, a tank top, and flip flops with maybe a pair of earbuds, and it makes me cringe every time. According to the CDC, over 36,000 chainsaw-related injuries a year are reported with annual medical costs of more than \$350 million (Johnson, 2023). Wearing the proper personal protective equipment (PPE) can help prevent accidents and injuries (Fig. 1). PPE is there to protect you from head to toe and if you are investing in a chainsaw, it doesn't take much more to invest in the proper PPE. Including a work shirt and pants, if you're using a chainsaw you should wear protection for your head, eyes and ears, hands, legs, and feet, most of which can be found at your local hardware store or home center.



Protecting your head means using a helmet, not a baseball cap or bandanna. Depending on the type of work you're doing there is a risk of being struck by wood or branches or if kickback occurs, sending the chainsaw back towards your head. Safety glasses will help keep sawdust and other debris out of your eyes and should

be stamped with Z87.1, showing they conform to ANSI safety regulations. Normal glasses and sunglasses are not rated for being struck and can shatter, sending broken lenses into your eyes. Ear protection can be in the form of plugs or muffs and should be rated to reduce noise to appropriate levels when worn properly.

Most modern chainsaws have built-in anti vibration technology to reduce fatigue, but having a nice pair of work gloves will still help to protect your hands and grip. Gloves will help protect against debris and are also good to wear for chainsaw maintenance. Although not about PPE, another note on protecting your hands when operating a chainsaw includes the proper use of the chain brake. Injuries can occur on the right hand because operators will remove it from the back handle to activate the chain brake with the palm of their hand and miss it, putting their hand on the still moving chain. Injuries on either hand can happen when one handing a saw while using your other hand to brace or manage what you are cutting and losing control. The chain brake is designed to be engaged by popping your left wrist forward while maintaining a grip with both hands on the handles.

To protect your legs some form of chaps or chap pants are needed. Prices can range from around \$40 for a pair of wrap-chaps that can be worn over your work pants up to around \$400 for a high-end pair of chap pants that are a stand-alone work pant replacement. Whichever you choose to wear, the protection should be from the top of your thigh to the top of your foot and wrap around your calf. Care should be taken to keep them clean from gas and oil and if they are ever damaged by a chainsaw, chaps should be discarded and replaced. Once the protective material has been damaged the safety has been compromised. Chainsaw boots are also available to protect your lower legs and feet but are expensive and can be heavy. A sturdy work boot should be worn at the very least while staying alert to how close the chainsaw is coming to you. And please, no open-toed shoes.

Whatever the task, if you are going to do your own chainsaw work, then I implore you to wear your PPE from head to toe. I know it's hot and can get uncomfortable, but all it takes is one mistake to send you to the ER. If you feel the job is beyond your

capabilities you can always contact an ISA certified arborist at [Find an Arborist](#) through the treesaregood.org website.

Johnson, R. (2023, July 19). *Chainsaw Accidents Injury Stats: How Dangerous Are Chainsaws?* Retrieved from Sawinery: <https://www.sawinery.net/chainsaws-injury-stats/>

Works Cited

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