

# Safety Short



## POWER LAWN MOWER SAFETY

Power mowers are common to most municipal operations. They are time saving tools that allow Maine communities to maintain their parks, athletic fields, and other public properties at a level among the finest in the country. However, a lawn mower can be extremely dangerous if it is not handled properly. Each year lawn mowing injures over 110,000 people seriously enough to require treatment in hospital emergency rooms. These injuries range in severity from minor cuts to amputations. The four primary causes of most of these injuries are: 1) contact with rotating blade 2) struck by propelled objects 3) overturning and 4) mower running over the victim.

### Following These Safe Work Practices Will Prevent Most Accidents

- ✓ Read operator manual. Read and follow the instructions carefully. The manual explains safe procedures that *must* be followed. Maintain the equipment according to manufacturer's specifications.
- ✓ Train the Operator(s). All operators must be trained on how the mower operates and its safety features. The operator should demonstrate through testing and/or observation that he/she can safely use the mower.
- ✓ Check guards and shields. Be sure all protective devices are functional before starting the mower. Test the "Operator-Presence Switch" (OPS) to make sure the mower stops immediately when you release the control. Never remove or alter safety equipment including the OPS, trailing toe shield and discharge chute protection.
- ✓ Check lawn before mowing. Remove rocks, glass, sticks, toys, and any other object that could cause injury or property damage if thrown by the mower blades. Observe (and mark) the location of fixed objects such as pipes, sprinkler heads, signs, curbing, and utilities that could be damaged or damage the mower.
- ✓ Watch for vehicle or pedestrian traffic. Make sure that dirt and debris can not injure or strike pedestrians, vehicles, or nearby property. Direct the discharge chute away from pedestrians and property. Be especially aware of children and pets in the area to make sure that a safe distance is maintained.
- ✓ Dress safely, use protective equipment. Always wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) such as hearing protection, safety glasses and a high visibility vest if working near vehicle traffic. Wear ankle high, good quality leather work boots; ANSI approved safety toes are preferred. No sandals! No sneakers!
- ✓ Persons sensitive to dust, pollen, grass, etc. should wear dust masks.
- ✓ Avoid over exposure to heat and sun. On hot days wear lightweight, loose-fitting, light-colored clothing and a brimmed hat. Drink plenty of water. Use sunscreen.
- ✓ Pay attention! Be aware of your surroundings. Do not wear headphones to listen to music when operating a mower. Mow advancing forward whenever possible so you can see where you are going. Do not engage in "horseplay". Mowing can be dangerous and should be regarded as such.
- ✓ No passengers on riding mowers. Extra riders can fall from a mower and be run over. Riders can distract the operator, contributing to careless mistakes.
- ✓ Do not use riding mowers on steep slopes. Mow up and down slopes when operating a riding mower. Mow across the slope when using a walk-behind mower.
- ✓ Store and handle fuel with care. Store gasoline only in approved containers with a self-closing spout and flash arrestor. Shut off the engine and allow cooling before fueling.
- ✓ Be aware of moving parts. Shut off the engine and be sure the blade has stopped completely before emptying the grass catcher, attempting to free obstructions from the discharge chute, adjusting the cutting height, or performing any operation that could place hands or feet near the blade. Disconnect the spark plug wire before cleaning, repairing, or inspecting the mower.
- ✓ Do not leave a mower unattended. Turn off the mower before you leave it – even for a moment. Remove the key and take it with you.

**REMEMBER - POWER MOWERS DO THE WORK; YOU HAVE TO DO THE THINKING! THINK SAFETY!**

(Also, see our Safety Short – Working Safely in Hot Conditions).