

BEING SAFE WITH GROUNDS EQUIPMENT

Video Script

The University of Georgia Cooperative Extension in partnership with the professional landscape industry proudly presents *Being Safe with Grounds Equipment*.

A safe and productive workday begins at the shop. When you arrive at work, you should be dressed properly. If you are going to operate an edger, weed eater or gas trimmer, you should wear long pants. Sturdy, closed-toed shoes with non-slip soles are also important for safety. Wear personal protective equipment, including safety glasses, earplugs, and gloves, when appropriate. Eye protection from harmful ultraviolet rays and dusty working conditions is essential on every job.

Each morning, notify your supervisor of any problems or concerns you have with the equipment you are assigned to use that day. Supervisors should only assign you to use equipment that you have been trained to use. Ask questions if you're not familiar with the operation of each piece of equipment.

Before loading the truck, make certain all equipment is in good operating condition. Once you are out on the job site, repairs and maintenance are much more difficult.

Move the equipment to level ground away from the building to check oil and gas levels. Use the proper oil and gas for the engine you are using. Some engines require the mixing of gas and oil, others don't. Know which fuel to use in each individual piece of equipment. Do not over-fill gas tanks because a spill could cause severe damage to plants or the environment. Never smoke while refueling equipment.

Check for loose nuts and bolts. Always disconnect the spark plug wire before servicing the equipment. On lawn mowers and other power equipment with blades, check the blades to make certain they are properly installed and sharp before leaving the shop.

For cold starts, use the choke to help start the engine. Ask your supervisor for specific instructions on using the choke setting.

Now, test start the engine. If you have a throttle control on your equipment, allow the engine to warm up at a low speed when the engine is cold. Avoid racing the engine too quickly because internal damage can result. Report any unusual equipment noises to your supervisor or the mechanic.

When loading and unloading the truck, use your legs and not your back to lift. Some equipment may require more than one person to lift. Follow your company's procedures for equipment placement in the truck or trailer. Make certain the equipment is secured properly to prevent accidents and equipment damage during transport.

Before you leave the shop area, make certain you have all the personal protection equipment that you may need later. Also, make sure your vehicle is equipped with a first-aid kit.

Re-check the equipment at each job site. Make certain the settings are correct for the equipment and the task.

On pull-start engines, use your arms, not your back, to pull the cord. When starting edgers and riding mowers, be sure the blade is disengaged before starting.

Using Mowers:

The features and controls of mowers may vary from one make or model to another, but all should be operated with the same basic precautions and techniques. Before mowing, check the wheel settings to be sure you are cutting the turfgrass at the recommended height. If you are unsure of the recommended mowing height, ask your supervisor. All mowers servicing the same property should be at the same height for a uniform, professional look.

Before you begin mowing, inspect the area for rocks, bottles and other debris because they can become flying projectiles. Scout the area for other obstructions, like sprinkler heads and metal stakes, to avoid striking these during operation. If you strike an object with the mower, stop immediately and check for damage. Remember to disconnect the spark plug wire before lifting the mower deck.

Mounting and dismounting turf areas with a mower should be done carefully. Turn off push mowers before mounting and dismounting curbs. On riding mowers, lower the engine speed and disengage the blade before mounting and dismounting curbs.

Always keep the discharge chute pointed away from pedestrians, pets and valuable property.

Always push the mower, never pull it because your feet can slip under the mower.

To prevent accidents, take a moment to study the angles of the slopes you are mowing. Avoid using riding mowers when the slope is greater than 15 degrees or 27 %. This is equivalent to a drop of approximately 3 feet over a distance of 10 feet. When using a push mower, mow from one side of the slope to the other. On riding mowers, mow up and down the slope.

You may need additional training before operating certain riding mowers and large walk-behind mowers. Let your supervisor know if you have not been trained for a piece of equipment you are asked to use.

Using Edgers:

Edgers can provide a crisp line between turfgrass and curb areas. Be familiar with all the controls on the edger your company uses. Always place hand-held edgers on the ground when starting.

Wear long pants and eye protection while edging. Protect your ears from damaging noise levels.

When using an edger, avoid hitting debris that could damage the blade and become a hazardous projectile.

Learn the angle of the curb and set the angle of the blade accordingly. Nicking concrete edging can damage the blade and is dangerous for the operator. Check the blade often for excessive wear and cracking.

Many workers carry a spare blade for the edger so they can change blades without returning to the work truck. Remember to disconnect the spark plug wire on all types of equipment when changing blades or doing other repairs.

Always be aware of any vehicles and people around you. Work facing on-coming traffic and wear a traffic security vest.

Using Weed Eaters:

Weed eaters are used to trim around objects that are hard to reach with a mower. The nylon string used in weed eaters can damage plants and injure people, so be aware of your surroundings at all times.

Eye protection and long pants are a must for the operator of the weed eater. Ear protection is optional, but well advised.

Most weed eaters come with guards and a harness. The guard is there for your safety, so leave it on. Adjust and wear the harness properly. Take breaks periodically to prevent muscle strain.

Keep the weed eater lines at the same length. The lines should not touch the guard, yet they should be long enough to effectively cut the intended weeds.

Use the weed eater with a slow, smooth, sweeping motion.

Using Blowers

A blower makes a good job look even better. Always wear eye and ear protection whenever you use a blower. Tuck in loose shirt tails to prevent them from being sucked into the air intake. Wear a brightly colored vest in traffic areas.

Blowers can scatter small rocks and other debris at amazing speeds, so avoid blowing debris near vehicles, co-workers or pedestrians. Blow debris to a pre-determined, safe collection site and away from storm drains. If a person or a vehicle passes by, lower the speed of the blower immediately.

Using Hedge Trimmers

A hedge trimmer is a high-speed, fast cutting power tool, so some special safety precautions must be observed. Always wear long pants, eye and ear protection, and gloves.

When starting, place the hedge trimmer on firm ground and maintain a good balance and secure footing. Check the idle speed and verify that the cutting blades are not turning while the engine is idling and the throttle trigger is released.

Always hold the hedge trimmer firmly with both hands and wrap your fingers tightly around the front and rear handles. When the cutting blades are engaged, make sure the unit is always away from your body. The cutting blades will continue to run for a short period after you let go of the throttle trigger, so use caution when maneuvering the hedge trimmer to another location. Use safe, proper cutting techniques to avoid injury.

Take special care when working in slippery conditions, and on slopes, or uneven ground. Inspect the area for obstacles or loose debris. If the blades ever become jammed, switch off the engine immediately and disconnect the spark plug wire before attempting to free the blades.

General Safety

Take short breaks when operating equipment to prevent fatigue-related accidents. Also, stay hydrated by drinking water throughout the day. Do not consume alcoholic beverages because they impair judgement and slow reflexes. Also avoid drinking beverages containing caffeine because they promote dehydration.

Field Maintenance

Sometimes equipment will just stop running or will not start. Your shop and mechanic may be a long way from where you are. By learning some basic equipment repair, "field first aid", you could save a trip back to the shop.

Here are some things to consider:

- Check the gas. Never re-fill the gas tank when the engine is hot.
- Verify the setting of all controls - is the on/off switch in the *on* position? Is the choke set correctly?
- Inspect the spark plug and plug wire to make sure there is a good connection.
- Remove and clean the spark plug and re-install it.
- Check the oil.
- Look for any obstructions or tangled material.
- Try to re-start the engine.

At the end of the work day, a cool down period is important for many pieces of equipment. Weed eaters and blowers should be allowed to cool down by running at idle for a minute or two after they have been used. NEVER cut off equipment by using the choke or pushing the kill switch while the engine is running at high speed.

Back at the shop, clean all equipment thoroughly. Use an air hose to clean debris from equipment. This procedure will reduce the risk of accidental fire.

Report any problems you had to your supervisor. Give the equipment to the shop repairmen to make necessary repairs.

Store your equipment correctly. Many supervisors rate their employees on how well they take care of their equipment.

Learn all you can about the equipment you use. Demonstrate to your supervisor your ability to utilize the tools of your trade safely and effectively. Before long, you will be noticed for your quality work and professionalism. This is what employers look for when promotion time comes around!

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