

Introduction

This leaflet covers the safe working practices to be followed when using a petrol-driven clearing saw.

You can use this leaflet, along with the manufacturer's handbook, as part of the risk assessment process to help identify the controls to put in place when using a clearing saw in forestry and other tree work.

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

Users of clearing saws should be particularly aware of the potential hazards of being cut by the saw, hit by timber and exposure to noise and vibration.

All operators must have had appropriate training in how to operate the machine and how to carry out the tasks required (see AFAG leaflet 805 *Training and certification*).

Personal protective equipment (PPE) required

- 1 Use the following PPE:
 - A safety helmet (complying with EN 397).
 - Hearing protection (complying with EN 352).
 - Eye protection (a mesh visor complying with EN 1731 or safety glasses/visor to EN 166).
 - Suitable protective gloves when handling the clearing saw and for protection from thorns, brambles and harmful weeds.
 - Protective boots with good grip and ankle support (complying with EN 345-1).
 - Non-slag outer clothing appropriate to the prevailing weather conditions. The use of high-visibility clothing may also be appropriate.
- 2 Hand-cleaning material such as waterless skin cleanser or soap, water and paper towels should be readily available.
- 3 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*).
- 4 Use a harness for supporting the machine which must be fitted and adjusted correctly - see the manufacturer's handbook.

The machine

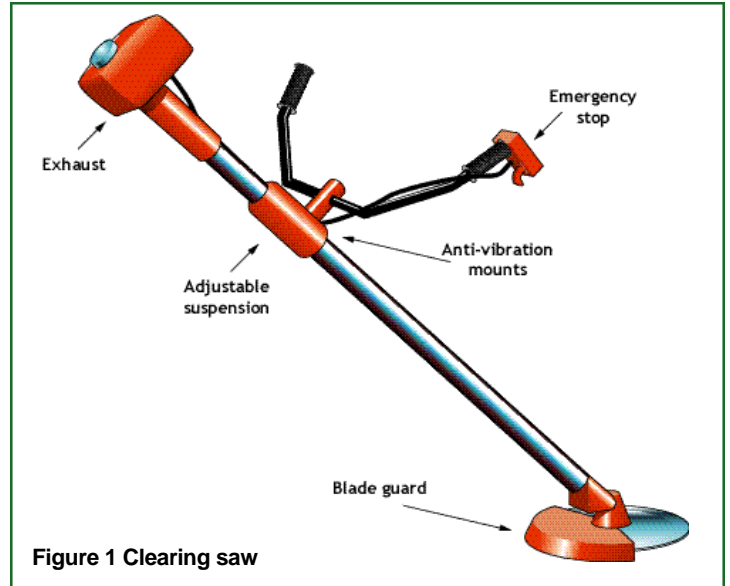


Figure 1 Clearing saw

- 5 Only use the clearing saw if:
 - the stop switch works and is clearly marked;
 - the blade guard and anti-vibration mounts are undamaged and functional;
 - the exhaust system and silencer are in good order;
 - there is an adjustable suspension ring for the harness.
- 6 Make sure you have the equipment recommended by the manufacturer to carry out sharpening, maintenance and adjustments, and a blade cover for transportation.
- 7 Kickback is the uncontrolled backward and/or upward motion of the clearing saw blade. It happens when a section of the blade (see Figure 2) contacts an object such as a log or branch or when the wood pinches the saw blade in the cut.

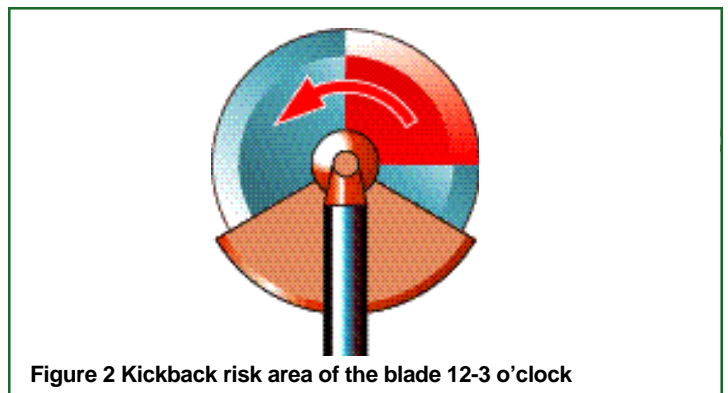


Figure 2 Kickback risk area of the blade 12-3 o'clock

Preparing to work

- ❑ **8** Ensure a risk assessment has been carried out 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.
- ❑ **9** 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 (out of the risk zones of the machines being used).
- ❑ **10** Ensure a designated and responsible person knows the daily work programme and agree with them a suitable emergency contact procedure. Where reasonably practicable use a mobile phone or radio and a pre-arranged call-in system.
- ❑ **11** Ensure the operators can provide the emergency services with enough detail for them to be found if there is an accident, 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. (Also see AFAG leaflet 802 *Emergency planning*.)
- ❑ **12** 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.

Maintenance

- ❑ **13** Ensure maintenance is carried out as specified in the manufacturer's handbook.
- ❑ **14** Keep a maintenance record.
- ❑ **15** Cover or remove the blade when the saw is not in use.
- ❑ **16** Check periodically throughout the day that:
 - the on/off switch is effective;
 - all nuts, bolts and screws are tight;
 - the blade is stationary when the engine is idling.
- ❑ **17** Ensure the saw blade is maintained according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- ❑ **18** Change the blade if it is cracked or any teeth are missing.

Fuelling

- ❑ **19** 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.

- ❑ **20** Store fuel to avoid vapour ignition from any source such as fires, people smoking or the clearing saw. Select a site shaded from direct sunlight and away from watercourses and drains.
- ❑ **21** Use fuel containers that incorporate a non-spill spout. The containers must be clearly labelled and have caps which fit securely.
- ❑ **22** Replace the fuel cap securely, ensuring that the 'O'ring seal on the cap is in good condition.
- ❑ **23** Keep fuel from contacting the skin. If fuel gets into the eyes wash out with sterile water immediately and seek medical advice as soon as possible.
- ❑ **24** Move a safe distance (normally at least 4 m) from the fuelling point before starting the clearing saw.

Before starting

- ❑ **25** The operator should ensure they have been informed of all hazards (including toxic plants and ground debris) identified in the worksite assessment and can state the control measures to be followed.
- ❑ **26** Carry out pre-start checks, ensuring that safety guards and attachments are securely fixed in position.
- ❑ **27** Agree your method of operation with other workers, including keeping a minimum of 15 m apart.
- ❑ **28** Check that the blade is seated correctly, is sharp and not cracked and that the blade retaining nut is secure.
- ❑ **29** Check that the balance of the saw is correct for the operating conditions.
- ❑ **30** Check that the handles give a comfortable working stance. If adjustment is required re-secure the locking screws.
- ❑ **31** Check that the weight of the saw is spread evenly over both shoulders and that the blade hangs straight in front of you.
- ❑ **32** Ensure the emergency release system is working efficiently.

Operation

- ❑ **33** To start, place the machine on level ground with the blade clear of debris.
- ❑ **34** Ensure the blade is stationary when the engine is idling.
- ❑ **35** Always run at full throttle for safe cutting.
- ❑ **36** Operate smoothly using your legs and hips to move the machine.
- ❑ **37** Organise the work sequence so that any debris ejected by the saw flies into a safe zone.

