

Safety Note #91

BRUSH CHIPPER SAFETY



*Photograph Courtesy of UC Hansen
Agricultural Learning Center*

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), between 1992 and 2002 a total of 31 occupational injury deaths were attributable to mobile brush chippers. Twenty-one (68%) fatalities were the result of being caught or compressed by the chipper, and nine (29%) deaths were the result of being struck by the machine or a machine part. The CDC also estimated 2,042 injuries resulted from working with chippers, an average of 204 per year. One thousand two hundred and twenty-four (60%) of the injuries were to an upper extremity. From 1992 through 1996, an estimated 155 amputations involved brush chipper operations. California Code of Regulations Title 8, Sections 3421 and 3428 (3) through (6) address brush chipper training and use.

Pre-Use Activities

- Prior to performing the job assignment, brush chipper operators shall review the manufacturer's operating instructions and receive training in the proper operation, feeding, starting, shutdown, and emergency procedures for the brush chipper being used.
- Brush chipper operators and other employees assisting with brush chipper tasks shall be instructed about safe work practices and potential or existing hazards unique to the job assignment.
- Brush chipper maintenance shall only be performed by employees that are authorized and trained to perform such operations.
- Access panels for maintenance and adjustment must be closed and secured prior to operation of brush chippers.
- Brush chippers detached from trucks shall be chocked or otherwise secured to prevent movement. When in the tow position, the brush chipper safety chains shall be crossed under the tongue of the chipper and affixed securely to the towing vehicle.

Operating Precautions

- When the brush chipper is in operation, at least one worker in addition to the operator shall be in the immediate vicinity of the work area.
- Eye and hearing protection are to be worn by the chipper operator and other employees assisting with brush chipper tasks at all times.
- Care shall be taken so that no foreign objects (non-wood) are fed into the chipper blades.
- The brush chipper shall be fed from the side of the centerline.
- The chipper operator shall immediately turn away from the feed chute when brush is taken into the rotor.
- The chipper chute shall never be raised or removed while the rotor is turning.
- Loose clothing, gauntlet-type gloves, rings, and watches are not to be worn by workers feeding the chipper.
- Small branches shall be fed into the brush chipper with longer branches or by utilizing a long stick for pushing.
- Hands or other parts of the body shall not be placed into the infeed hopper.
- Leaning into or pushing material into the infeed hoppers with your feet is prohibited.
- Always stop the brush chipper before clearing any obstructions from the infeed hopper.
- Use lockout/tagout procedures (see Safety Note #55) when performing any maintenance on brush chippers.