



Spring Clean Up and Chainsaw Safety

Each winter Mother Nature leaves behind a mess of fallen tree limbs for us to clean up in the springtime. Most of our members will be operating chainsaws, chippers, aerial lifts and other dangerous equipment while clearing away the debris. In addition to the use of this equipment, some other exposures emerge such as ticks, poison ivy and mosquitoes. The following are some safety reminders to consider while cleaning up this spring.

Chainsaw safety:

- Wear long sleeve shirts, pants and gloves when handling tree limbs to help prevent splinters and to limit exposure to poison oak/ivy/sumac.
- Do not attempt to lift large limbs by yourself. Trim the limb into smaller pieces that are easier to handle or ask a co-worker for assistance.
- Choose the right chainsaw. Depending on the type of work you need to do, the diameter size of the trees you need to trim, different size saws may be necessary. Make sure you have training on each type of saw before you operate.
- Make sure you have training on the type of cutting you plan to do. Small trees, large trees and limbs will require a different type of cut. Notching, plunging, sectional cutting and the use of wedges can be extremely hazardous to those less experienced.
- If an electric or utility line is overhead, do not cut in this area unless there is no chance of interference. Especially if trees are wet. Assume all lines are energized! In some areas, qualified high-tension linesmen are required to be present.
- Before starting your chainsaw check the controls, chain tension, handles and bolts to ensure they are all working properly. Inspect the equipment for deterioration and wear and tear.
- Equip yourself with proper protective clothing and equipment. Safety goggles, hearing protection; hardhat, steel-toed shoes and glove. Chainsaw chaps should also be used. Inspect PPE prior to use.
- Always start the chainsaw on a stable surface, not in mid-air. Do not force a chainsaw to cut, depending on the hardness of the wood and the sharpness of the chain, it could cut slower in some situations.
- Determine the best possible fall direction that will not create other hazards or make clean up difficult.
- Always be prepared to react to kickback and plan a safe, unobstructed path of retreat before cutting. Take a moment to consider what could go wrong if a limb does not fall as you intended. Is there a potential for released tension on a limb? Could the top of the tree fall off?

- To prevent kickback: keep your saw teeth sharp and even, maintain a firm hold on the saw, keep the tip guard in place when possible, and use a saw with a chain brake or kickback guard.
- When sharpening teeth, ensure equal number of strokes for each tooth. If filling the “rakes” ensure they are at the same height (and not too low) to prevent kickback.
- Always cut below shoulder height.
- Always avoid making cuts with the saw between your legs. Never straddle a limb you plan to cut.
- Position yourself and others out of line with the chain if it were to break.
- Shut off the chainsaw when walking.
- Store and transport chainsaws with the chain guard in place in a dry area.
- Never work alone. Have a first aid kit and cell phone available at all times.

Insect-borne diseases:

Deer ticks are everywhere today. They carry a bacterium, which causes an infection known as Lyme disease. In 2005, Massachusetts had the fourth highest incident rate of Lyme disease nationwide. Below are some reminders to help protect you from this disease.

- Ticks cannot jump or fly. They must come in direct contact with a host. Once a tick latches onto human skin it will generally climb until it reaches a creased area such as the back of the knee, groin, navel, armpit, or ears.
- Learn to recognize a deer tick. See picture.
- Scan your clothes and skin while outdoors.
- Tuck your pant leg into your shoes and wear tight woven clothing.
- Use insect repellent containing DEET when going into overgrown areas.
- Try to avoid sitting on the ground or stone walls when possible.
- Keep long hair tied back.
- Do a full body check for ticks at the end of the day.



Mosquitoes are attracted to the carbon dioxide from your breath. They also seem to be attracted to scents such as soap, shampoo, deodorant, detergent, perfume and body odor. Spring clean up work can be quite intensive and demanding, so the harder we breathe and sweat, the more likely we are to attract mosquitoes.

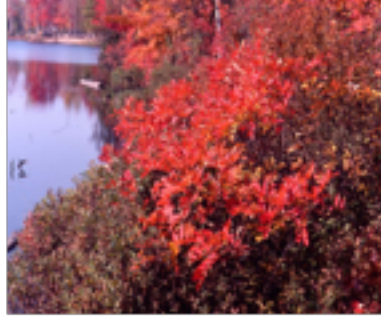
To help prevent mosquito bites:

- Wear long sleeve pants/shirts and a hat when possible.
- Wear light colored clothing when possible, mosquitoes are attracted to dark clothing.
- DEET has proven to be the most effective mosquito repellent.



Poison Ivy/Oak/Sumac:

These poisonous plants can cause severe itching, skin irritation and sleeplessness. Some are more allergic to these plants than others. For those who are very allergic, the rashes that can result are quite irritating and can affect our job performance in many ways. Below are pictures and descriptions of the main poisonous plants found in MA.



- Urushiol Oil in these plants is what causes the allergic reaction and resulting dermatitis. The plants secrete the oil when they are bruised or damaged.
- The oil can remain active as a toxin for long periods of time.
- One nanogram (one billionth of a gram) is all that is needed to cause a rash.
- The transfer of the oil may come from any number of means but direct skin contact with plants is not needed to cause oil transfer. It can be transferred with smoke particles from burning brush, dust particles from mowing/trimming, pets, tools and clothing.
- Use of herbicides can be used to control the spread of plants but this is difficult to manage and usually not focused on the areas where you will most likely be working.
- Pre-exposure creams and post-exposure creams can be applied to help prevent exposure.
- When possible try to survey the area where you will be working to determine which plants are present. Use of long sleeve clothing can help provide a barrier.
- Educate yourself on how to identify plants.
- Wash your skin as soon as possible after exposure with cool water and a mild soap. Rubbing alcohol can also be used. Be sure to decontaminate clothing and tools as well.
- If a rash appears many over the counter itch relief creams can be applied to treat them. However, often times an injection or oral medication is needed.

