

TPE Chainsaw Use Guidelines¹

Adopted by the Board on 6/9/2026

Introduction

Purpose:

The use of chainsaws presents an inherent risk to users and others nearby. Chainsaws are important tools used for tree and brush removal aspects of land management and ecological restoration. The safe and efficient use of chainsaws is critical to the success of the work performed by The Prairie Enthusiasts as well as the success of our mission.

There is an inherent danger including risk of death involved in chainsaw use. Over 28,000 chainsaw related injuries occur in the United States each year. The risk of chainsaws is greatly reduced through the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and safe work practices.

Land Management Staff:

Land management staff are defined as paid employees of The Prairie Enthusiasts (TPE) that engage in land management activities as part of their paid duties. TPE land management staff are held to high standards of professionalism and compliance not expected of volunteers. Land management staff are expected to adhere to all TPE as well as OSHA and any other applicable workplace standards.

TPE land management staff are obligated to be provided with training, equipment, and all required Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). Land management staff are provided with safety instruction and PPE, which is not mandatory to be provided to volunteers. All land management staff are required to ensure the chainsaw safety policy is understood and followed at all times.

Volunteers:

TPE strongly encourages safety training for all volunteers and will require it in the future. Volunteers are expected to read, understand, and follow the chainsaw

¹ These guidelines are derived largely from OSHA requirements regarding chainsaw safety. Language should be considered mandatory unless clearly stated as suggestion.

guidelines when operating chainsaws on TPE property or during TPE sponsored work parties or other events. TPE may sometimes provide volunteers with appropriate PPE but is not responsible for the condition of required PPE voluntarily used by volunteers. Volunteers are responsible for providing their own required PPE when not provided by TPE. All volunteers must not operate a chainsaw without it.

Section 1: Training

Land Management Staff

TPE land management staff are required to receive training including chainsaw safety, First Aid, CPR, and any other task specific training required to be able to safely perform work assignments. Training should comply with applicable OSHA standards, such as those for logging, PPE, bloodborne pathogens and medical services, and first aid. Wilderness First Aid training is strongly recommended. SAWW (Safety and Woods Worker) Level 1 and 2 are recommended for all TPE land management staff. SAWW Level 3 and 4 are recommended for land management staff supervising others in the use of chainsaws.

Site Stewards and volunteers

Site stewards and other volunteers who operate chainsaws or who supervise the use of chainsaws by other volunteers are strongly encouraged to receive chainsaw safety, First Aid, and CPR training. Wilderness First Aid Training is strongly encouraged. SAWW 1 training is recommended for all volunteers.

Section 2: Personal Protective Equipment

All required PPE must be worn at all times while operating a chainsaw on TPE property, during TPE work parties, or other TPE sponsored or affiliated events. TPE is responsible for providing land management staff with all necessary PPE and making sure PPE is maintained in serviceable condition. An employee may choose to use personal PPE, but all PPE must meet basic requirements and be maintained in serviceable condition. All PPE must be inspected for damage and defects prior to use and be repaired or replaced if necessary, prior to operating a chainsaw.

Volunteers may use their own PPE or be supplied with the required PPE depending on availability and other conditions. Full PPE, in good condition, must be worn at all times while operating a chainsaw regardless of availability.

Required PPE

Chaps/Chainsaw Resistant Pants

TPE land management staff must be provided with appropriate leg protection when operating a chainsaw. PPE must be properly maintained and inspected prior to use. Supervisors are responsible for ensuring adequate PPE is provided and worn as required.

Use of a chainsaw requires wearing leg protection consisting of cut-resistant material approved for chainsaw use. Even during conditions of occasional chainsaw use, chaps or chainsaw pants must be worn at all times. A potentially deadly chainsaw accident can occur to any chainsaw user. Protection must cover the full length of the thigh to the top of the boot on each leg.

There is currently no standardized testing specifically for comparing electric chainsaws to gas powered chainsaws. Chaps or other approved leg protection worn will decrease the risk of injury during chainsaw operation and should always be worn.

Chainsaw leg protection, consisting of chaps or chainsaw pants, function through the use of fibers that bind and prevent the movement of the chainsaw chain. To function appropriately as PPE, chaps or chainsaw pants must be maintained in good condition. Chaps and pants should be kept clean and regularly washed. Wash PPE if bar oil or other substance is spilled on chaps or pants.

Minor holes or cuts resulting from normal workplace conditions such as burn piles, barbed wire fences, thorns and brambles, should be repaired to prevent compromising the integrity of the chaps.

Any damage to chaps or pants resulting from direct contact with a chainsaw must be immediately reported within 24 hours using the TPE Near Miss Report. Land management staff must notify their supervisors. Contact between a running chain and any part of the user's body is cause to stop operations and have a full incident review.

Boots

TPE land management staff are required to have adequate foot protection when operating chainsaws. Supervisors are responsible for ensuring adequate PPE is available and worn as required.

Sturdy, closed-toe boots must be worn at all times. Boots must be tall enough to overlap with chaps when worn. Boots must be heavy-duty boots such as logging boots which are waterproof or water-resistant, cover and provide ankle support, and are constructed of cut-resistant material capable of protecting against injury caused by a running chainsaw.

Helmet

TPE land management staff must be provided with an approved helmet when operating a chainsaw. Supervisors are responsible for ensuring adequate PPE is available and worn as required. Volunteers may be provided with a helmet by TPE or use a personal helmet. A chainsaw helmet must always be worn when using a chainsaw on TPE property, during a TPE sponsored work party, or other TPE affiliated event. Helmets should be inspected prior to use for cracks or defects. Helmets expire due to degradation caused by UV light exposure. Check the date on the inside of the helmet for when the helmet should be replaced, typically every five years. Helmets should be replaced when expired, damaged, or otherwise as needed.

Gloves

Gloves must be worn when operating a chainsaw. Gloves should offer reasonable protection against abrasion and cuts. When simultaneously handling herbicide, chemical-resistant gloves should be worn.

Eye Protection

Eye protection, consisting of a face shield and safety glasses, must be worn at all times when operating a chainsaw. Safety glasses are preferred due to the ability of thrown chips or small branches to pass beneath the face shield. Safety glasses must always be worn while simultaneously handling herbicide.

Ear Protection

Ear protection, consisting of earplugs, earmuffs, or both, is required when operating a chainsaw or working close to a chainsaw operator.

Section 3: Safety and First Aid

First Aid Kit

A cell phone, stop-the-bleed kit, and/or trauma first aid kit, including a CAT tourniquet, should be on site. The number of operators present, the size of the work area, and the scope and complexity of the work involved should be reflected in the amount and distribution of first aid on site. Kits should be inspected annually.

Please refer to Appendix A. for further information on OSHA requirements.

Section 4: Pre-Operation Checklist

Fueling

Refuel while chainsaw is on the ground and at least 10 ft from any ignition source. Fuel containers must be no more than 5 gallons and be approved by the Department of Transportation or other nationally recognized testing laboratory. When refueling in the vicinity of wetlands, operators should exercise particular caution to avoid spills. Refueling should not occur in wetlands.

Chainsaw operators must maintain enough fuel or battery life on hand to complete felling a tree. Trees should not be left standing, partially cut, under any circumstances.

Equipment Inspection

All equipment should be inspected prior to use to ensure it is in good working order. Land management staff must inspect equipment and make sure equipment is well maintained. Axes or other tools used for driving felling wedges should be inspected to make sure heads are firmly hung and handles are not splintered, cracked or otherwise damaged. Broken or damaged equipment should be flagged and documented. Damaged equipment must not be used until the required repairs are made.

Chainsaw Inspection

Chainsaw Pre-Operation Checklist	
Task	Notes
Inspect Muffler	Tighten/replace torque screws as needed
Inspect Spark Arrestor	Make sure spark arrestor is present and in good condition
Chain Brake	Make sure chain brake is working

Idle Speed	Make sure chain comes to a rest at idle
Handle/AV System	Inspect for damage. Tighten/replace torque screws as needed. Replace any missing components
Inspect Chain	Make sure chain is sharp and in good condition. Make sure depth height is properly maintained
Inspect Chain Catch	Replace if damaged or missing
Inspect Throttle Lock	Chainsaws must have a throttle lock and be in proper working condition

Starting the Chainsaw

Start the chainsaw on the ground or in the 'leg-lock' position with the chain brake engaged. Drop starting a chain saw is prohibited.

Section 5: Maintaining a Safe Worksite

Hazards

Identify any hazards such as snags, widow-makers, hanging branches, power lines and have a plan to mitigate any hazards identified. If hazards cannot be properly mitigated, work should not occur in the area.

Work sites and cutting operations must be planned so that chainsaw operators and all others involved are sufficiently spaced to avoid hazards related to contact with running saws, falling trees, and other hazards inherent to chainsaw operations. When operations involve tree felling, worksites should be arranged so that the distance between workers is at least twice the height of trees being felled. Chainsaw operators should clearly notify all other workers in the vicinity prior to felling a tree. Once the tree is felled, the operator should give the "all-clear" signal.

Each person working at a site should remain in visual or audible contact with another person. Hand signals and audible devices such as whistles or radios are recommended.

No person should ever operate a chainsaw alone.

In the event a felled tree contacts any power line, the power company must be notified immediately. All persons shall remain clear of the area until the power company advises that there are no electrical hazards.

While manual felling is in progress, no vehicles, structures, or other equipment shall be within two tree lengths of trees being manually felled.

No person shall approach a chainsaw operator closer than two tree lengths of trees being felled until the chainsaw operator has acknowledged that it is safe to do so, or unless the work supervisor determines that a team is necessary to manually fell a particular tree.

Refusing Risk

Deciding to walk away from a hazardous situation is the most professional thing a sawyer can do. Do not attempt to operate a chainsaw when the hazard or level of complexity is beyond the skill and experience of the chainsaw operator. Follow the Risk Refusal protocol and make sure the work supervisor is aware. Refer to the Risk Refusal Policy for further guidance.

Section 6: Operating a Chainsaw

Maintain good footing while operating a chainsaw, taking time to identify and remove potential hazards from the cutting zone. Keep feet firmly placed when operating a chainsaw. Cutting in-tree or from ladders is not permitted by TPE staff or volunteers.

Keep both hands on the chainsaw during operation with thumb firmly wrapped around the handle.

Do not cut directly overhead or operate chainsaw above shoulder height.

Ease off throttle and engage chain brake prior to taking more than two steps. Turn off chainsaw if walking more than 50 ft.

Maintaining Situational Awareness

Situational awareness is defined as awareness of oneself and environment that allows one to maintain a safe and efficient working environment. Situational awareness includes human factors and personal awareness such as fatigue, dehydration, stress, mental distraction, and other factors, as well as environmental conditions such as hazards, risks, and nearby persons and

objects. Maintaining situational awareness is critical to safe and efficient chainsaw operations. Stay aware of one's environment and personal limits. Know when it is time to stop cutting or take a break.

Section 7: Transportation

OSHA regulations prohibit the transportation of flammable or combustible liquids within a vehicle. TPE land management staff are not permitted to transport flammable or combustible goods within the cab of any vehicle for work-related purposes. Volunteers are strongly encouraged not to transport flammable or combustible materials within the cab of any vehicle and should find alternatives for transporting fuel and other potentially hazardous materials or equipment to work locations.

Always remove batteries from battery-operated saws for transport.

ATVs and UTVs must be equipped with all applicable safety features and be equipped with a fire extinguisher.

Appendix A: First-Aid Kits (Mandatory)

The following list sets forth the minimally acceptable number and type of first-aid supplies for first-aid kits required under paragraph (d)(2) of the OSHA logging standard. The contents of the first-aid kit listed should be adequate for small work sites, consisting of approximately two to three employees. When larger operations or multiple operations are being conducted at the same location, additional first-aid kits should be provided at the work site or additional quantities of supplies should be included in the first-aid kits:

1. Gauze pads (at least 4 x 4 inches).
2. Two large gauze pads (at least 8 x 10 inches).
3. Box adhesive bandages (band-aids).
4. One package gauze roller bandage at least 2 inches wide.

5. Two triangular bandages.
6. Wound cleaning agent such as sealed moistened towelettes.
7. Scissors.
8. At least one blanket.
9. Tweezers.
10. Adhesive tape.
11. Latex gloves.
12. Resuscitation equipment such as resuscitation bag, airway, or pocket mask.
13. Two elastic wraps.
14. Splint.
15. Directions for requesting emergency assistance.