

## **Don't Get Mowed Down: How to avoid lawn mower injuries**

### **National Summer Safety Week**

For some Canadians, mowing the lawn is a pleasant summer activity... the fresh sunny air, the aroma of cut grass and the satisfaction of getting a chore done with a side helping of exercise. This all remains true, if safety precautions are taken and safety measures are in place.

Too many have suffered needlessly over a split second miscalculation while using a lawn mower. Take Chris for example. Chris was using his walk-behind lawn mower for trimming the grass in the imposing ditch at the end of his front lawn property. Last summer, while standing in the ditch and guiding his mower up and down the embankment, Chris lost his footing and saw his foot disappear under the mower, directly into the spinning blades. One instance of mishap lead to months of recuperation and healing, including skin grafts from his thigh and a long battle of fighting infection.

Chris was lucky, in that he did not lose a portion of his foot. Lacerations (32 per cent) and amputations (16 per cent) account for most of the injuries involving lawn mowers according to data collected by Canadian Hospitals Injury Reporting and Prevention Program (CHIRPP). A total of 1161 patients with 1451 injuries presented between 14 and 16 hospitals across Canada, between 1990 and 2006. Overall, the most common injuries involved someone slipping or tripping under a mower (23 per cent).

Especially shocking is that a total of 48 per cent of the patients were 15 years old and younger. This is a high number considering that children should not even be in the yard when it is being mowed. For patients under 1 year old, nearly 70 per cent of injuries were burns occurring when the child touched the hot lawnmower engine or muffler. For patients under 15 years old, the burns and amputations rates increased. Sadly, there have been cases of youngsters suffering permanent debilitating injuries from sharing a yard with a running lawn mower. Tragedy can occur when a child falls off a ride-on mower while riding with an adult, when a ride-on mower is placed into reverse and the operator is unaware that a child is behind, when a child is too young to handle a lawn mower, or when debris is thrown by a mower and strikes a child.

Before mowing, walk around and be on the look out for hazards including tree stumps and holes. Pick up debris including stones, sticks, toys etc. Keep young children out of the yard when it is being mowed. Read your owners manual and follow manufacturer recommendations for safety and maintenance including ensuring guards and shields are tightly fastened.

### **Safety Recommendations:**

- Dress appropriately: long pants, long-sleeved shirts, eye and ear protection, heavy gloves as well as sturdy, closed-toed shoes with slip resistant rubber soles. Wear sun protection, a wide-brimmed hat and drink plenty of water.
- Never disengage the fail-safe mechanism (dead man switch) found on power mowers. It triggers an important safety feature of stopping the blades quickly as soon as the handle of a walk-behind mower is released or the operator of a ride-on mower falls off of the seat.

- Turn the mower off before attempting to examine the blades, dislodge debris or adjust wheel height.
- Avoid mowing the lawn when it is wet and slippery.
- Do not allow children under the age of 16 to use ride-on mowers and children under the age of 12 to use walk-behind mowers.

**Special Recommendations for Ride on Mowers:**

- Never allow passengers on ride on mowers.
- Always look behind before putting a ride-on mower in reverse.
- Slow down to mow slopes and take turns wide and gradual. To avoid tipping over, mow down a slope, not across.

**Mowing a ditch?**

It is strongly recommended to use a hand-held string trimmer. Follow the safety recommendations, keep firm footing and balance; don't overreach and take the time to read the operator's manual.

Lawn mower injuries are preventable. Enjoy a tall glass of lemonade after a job well done using the Canada Safety Council's safety recommendations