

# Talks **ZONE**

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**TZ1816**

## Keep your guard up with mowers

**W**hether you are cutting grass and weeds at home or as part of your job, operating a power mower can be a pleasant task — but dozens of people are killed and many thousands injured every year because proper safety precautions were not taken.

Needless suffering can result from unsafe use of equipment that includes agricultural tractor-mowers, ride-on mowers and walk-behind mowers.

The most common serious accidents are rollovers and being caught in or struck by moving parts.

A disproportionate number of victims are children under the age of 15. While most of the accidents involving them occur in a home setting, they also can be at risk on a job site if mower operators don't follow safe procedures, such as making sure youngsters stay far enough away that they don't get hit by flying debris.

Tragedy also can occur when a child (or anyone else, for that matter) falls off a ride-on mower while it is moving or when the machine is placed into reverse. Ride-on mowers should never carry passengers.

Using a mower safely requires knowing more than how all its controls work. Here are some key safety tips:

- Wear appropriate clothing — long pants, close-fitting clothes and non-slip safety toe footwear (no bare feet, sandals or sneakers) — as well



as hearing, eye and face protection.

- Check that guards and shields are in place and working. Never operate the mower with damaged safety devices or attempt to bypass their operation. Do not remove any safety devices.
- When operating an agricultural mower, ensure there is a shield covering the power take-off (PTO) to keep you from being entangled in the rotating shaft.
- Fill the fuel tank before starting the engine. Never fuel the mower when it is running or while the engine is hot. Use a funnel to prevent spillage on the engine.
- Before starting the mower, check the work area for sticks, stones and any other objects that might be thrown by the blade.
- Set the wheel height prior to starting the engine.
- Do not put hands or feet near rotating parts or under the cutting deck of the mower.
- Slopes are a major factor related to

slip-and-fall and rollover incidents. Mow across the slope, never up and down. Watch for holes, ruts, rocks, hidden objects or bumps that can cause you to slip or trip.

- Be cautious on wet grass, where slips can cause a fall into the equipment's moving parts. Wet grass also can cause riding mowers and agricultural tractors to slide or skid.
- If the mower clogs, never use your hands to clear it, even if the mower is shut off. Always use a stick or other tool.
- Avoid pulling a mower back toward you. If you need to back the mower away from a wall or obstacle first look down and behind to avoid tripping then step back to fully extend your arms. Be sure you are well balanced with sure footing. Pull the mower back slowly, no more than half way towards you.
- With an electric mower, ground fault circuit interrupter (GFCI) protection should be provided on the circuit(s) or outlet(s) to be used.
- To prevent electric shock, use an approved extension cord set suitable for outdoor use. First cut the area nearest the electrical outlet, then gradually move away to minimize chances of running over the power cord and being electrocuted.

The material contained in this document has been prepared from sources believed to be accurate and reliable. Application of this information to a specific worksite should be reviewed by a safety professional. Anyone making use of the information set forth herein does so at their own risk and assumes any and all liability arising therefrom. Specific medical advice should be obtained through consultation with a physician or other trained health care practitioner.

## The Quiz

These questions are meant to help you remember what was discussed today — not to test your patience or challenge your intelligence. The answers are at the bottom of the page. Cover them up, and complete the quiz as quickly as you can.

## Hold These Thoughts

Safety starts before the engine does. A thorough inspection of a power mower is important before beginning work.

Workers should alert their supervisor if they find anything wrong during a regular pre-start visual inspection, which should include:

- Checking for loose or damaged belts. Loose belts can slip, causing friction and a possibly a fire. Belts can also break and be flung from the mower. Tighten loose belts and replace belts if any ply separation or cracks are visible.

- Making sure the blade is secure, balanced and covered to prevent injury. Bent, cracked or worn blades should be replaced promptly.

- Protecting their hands with heavy-duty gloves when inspecting blades.

- Making sure there are no fluid leaks, which can be a fire hazard as well as cause break-downs.

- Clearing the mower deck and chute for accumulation of grass clippings, leaves, grease and other debris. Build-up of this material on moving parts is a fire hazard and can cause break-downs.

- On equipment with inflatable tires, checking tire pressure and looking for signs of damage. Make sure lug bolts are tight to keep the wheel from slipping off.

- Ensuring that any mower attachments are mounted and fastened correctly.

1. Rollovers and being caught in or struck by moving parts are the most common serious incidents involving power mowers.

TRUE \_\_\_\_ FALSE \_\_\_\_

2. Should operators of ride-on mowers allow others to be on the machine while it is moving?

YES \_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_

3. Which of these should NOT be worn while operating a power mower?

- A. Loose-fitting shirts and pants.
- B. Hat.
- C. Non-slip footwear.
- D. Hearing protection.
- E. Eye protection.

4. Safety devices can be removed from mowers if it is done carefully.

TRUE \_\_\_\_ FALSE \_\_\_\_

5. Which of these should be properly shielded when operating an agricultural mower?

- A. Rear wheels.
- B. Engine compartment.
- C. Power take-off (PTO) shaft.
- D. Driver's seat.

6. A mower can be fueled while it is running if a funnel is used.

TRUE \_\_\_\_ FALSE \_\_\_\_

7. Which of these are precautions to take for safe use of a power mower?

- A. Before starting mower check the work area for objects that might be thrown while it operates.
- B. Set wheel height before starting the mower.
- C. Always mow across a slope, not up and down.
- D. Never use your hands to clear clogs.
- E. All of the above.

8. Is there an operator's manual available for any power mower you might use?

YES \_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_ DON'T KNOW \_\_\_\_

**ANSWERS:** 1. True, 2. No, 3. A., 4. False, 5. C., 6. False, 7. E., 8. Your answer

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## For the Record

Date of Meeting: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Start Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Finish Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Meeting Leader: \_\_\_\_\_

In Attendance:


## It really happened...

A 43-year-old male maintenance worker died after the mower he was operating rolled on top of him as he was mowing up a bank. The victim was a member of a five-person crew working at a highway rest stop.

While the victim mowed the grass, the crew leader and two co-workers cleaned the inside of the rest stop buildings. One coworker remained outside and cleaned up around the landscaping. The victim had begun to mow along a bank bordering one of the parking lots. One section had a 35-degree slope. The victim had been instructed by the crew leader to mow across the bank and not all the way up due to the steep slope. He also was instructed to use a weed eater to finish cutting the grass the rest of the way up.

As the victim began to mow the bank, the coworker working outside with him said he was going inside to get a drink and get out of the sun for a while. When the coworker returned a while later, he found the mower overturned, with the victim pinned underneath it. He was subsequently pronounced dead at the scene.

Investigators concluded that, to help prevent similar occurrences, employers should:

- Ensure that employees operate machinery in accordance with manufacturers' guidelines.
- Ensure that foreign-born workers fully understand all information, particularly safety-related information, pertaining to their jobs.

**Note:** *TalksZone* safety meetings are not intended to take the place of your own safety procedures. Always consult and/or review your procedures before attempting any work.