Power Lawn Mower Safety

Mowing the grass is a task so common most don’t give it a second thought. Unfortunately, it presents significant hazards that can lead to serious injury, even death. In 2019 alone, no fewer than five Ohioans suffered serious injuries or died on the job while mowing grass. Each incident is a chilling reminder of the hazards that come with an activity so many of us find routine.

One Ohio man who had survived three tours in Iraq was killed on the job when the lawn mower he was operating rolled over and landed on its top in Massillon. Four other Ohio workers suffered serious injuries this year while operating lawnmowers.

The four injured workers included a 21-year-old man working in North Canton and a 75-year-old man in Chillicothe injured in roll-over accidents, a 47-year-old man working in Cleveland who suffered multiple amputations from contact with a running mower blade, and a 65-year-old man in Akron who was seriously injured by a flying baseball that was run over by a mower.

Have you trained your employees on the safe operation of lawn mowers? Employers are responsible for providing workers with proper training, safe equipment and the necessary personal protective equipment before they can operate any lawn mower.

The following tips and resources can help you make lawn mower operations safer for your workers.
General Riding Mower Tips

- Train and retrain employees to maintain competency to operate a riding mower safely.
- Always start riding mowers from the operator position.
- Never mount or dismount a mower when it is running.
- Make sure every riding mower includes an operable auto shut-off when the rider is not in the seat.
- Never carry passengers. Riding mowers are one-person machines.

Slope Mowing Tips

- Slopes are a major factor related to loss of control and tip-over accidents, which can result in injury or death.
- Operation on slopes requires extra caution. If you cannot back up the slope or if you feel uneasy on it, do not mow it.
- Never start or stop a riding mower when it is going uphill or downhill. Avoid all sudden starts, stops or turns.
- Examine all safety devices to ensure the Roll-Over Protection Structure (ROPS), guards, seat belts and shields are in place and properly used.
- To avoid injury or death from roll-over, use the seat belt and keep the ROPS fully raised and in the locked position.
- Check carefully for overhead clearance before driving under any objects and avoid contact with overhead objects. If necessary, lower the ROPS to provide safe clearance and then raise the ROPS as soon as clearance permits.
- If the tires lose traction, disengage the blades and proceed slowly straight down the slope.
- Be sure to travel side to side on hillsides. Turf conditions can affect the stability of the machine.
- Slow down and use caution when making turns and changing directions on slopes. Keep all movement on slopes slow and gradual.
- Do not mow on slopes greater than 15 degrees.
- Use caution while operating near drop-offs.
- The Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) suggests the following equipment options for different terrains:
  - 0° to 15° slope – riding mowers or tractor mowers are approved for these areas
  - 16° to 22° slope – tractor mowers are approved for use on these areas
  - 23° or more – these areas are mowed with string trimmers, push mowers or specialized equipment; specialized equipment can be riding mowers intended for use on slopes
  - Within 5 feet of a drop-off – a buffer zone is maintained; only string trimmers and push mowers can be used inside this zone
**General Tips**

- Read and understand the equipment manual.
- Survey terrain prior to mowing. Ensure mowing area is clear and free of people, debris or other potential flying object hazards.
- Identify obstacles you cannot remove in the mowing path (e.g., trees, large rocks, and manmade hazards such as signs and trash bins).
- Always wear personal protective equipment, including eye and hearing protection, and closed-toe shoes.
- Keep mower in good working order with sharp blades.
- Only use a mower that has protection over hot and sharp parts.
- Only refuel the motor when it is turned off and cooled down.
- Never insert hands or feet into mower or the discharge chute to remove grass or debris. Even if the motor is turned off, the blade could still be spinning.
- Make sure to stay away from the exhaust. A lawn mower can reach temperatures of up to 240 degrees Fahrenheit. Anyone near this exhaust could suffer a severe burn.
- Never cut grass when it is wet or damp.
- For push mowers: Only use mowers with an automatic shut-off device that stops all motion once you release or disengage the handle.

We provide on-site consultation services to private and public employers at no additional cost. You can request our services at [www.bwc.ohio.gov](http://www.bwc.ohio.gov) or by phone at **1-800-644-6292**.

**Other resources**

- [Mowing and Trimming Safety Manual - Kansas State University](#)
- [Lawn Mower Ground Maintenance - Advanced Safety & Health blog](#)
- [Dangers of Roll-Overs of Riding Mowers - OSHA](#)
- [OSHA - left slope indicator](#)
- [OSHA - right slope indicator](#)

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