Lawn Mowing Hazards

Lawn mowing is a routine but necessary task that must not be overlooked with regard to injury potential. Plan and implement a safety protocol to protect your employees. The task of lawn mowing presents dangers to operators and bystanders. A malfunction or misstep can injure the operator or throw debris at bystanders and property.

The safe operation of lawn mowing equipment reduces the chance of accidents that could result in serious injuries, death and property damage. Safe operation and proper maintenance also adds to the longevity and efficient use of the equipment.

As a service to our customers, Continental Western Group offers the following tips on lawn mowing safety.
OSHA
Recognizing the dangers that powered lawn mowers present, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration has a Standard, Subpart P 1910.243, which deals with the guarding of powered tools. The specific section that deals with lawn mowers is under 1910.243(e). While much of the regulation deals with manufacturer specifications, some of the relevant paragraphs are highlighted below.

- Walk-behind, riding-rotary and reel power lawnmowers shall be guarded in accordance with machine guarding requirements in 29 CFR 1910.212, which are general requirements for all machines.
- All power-driven chains, belts and gears shall be so positioned or otherwise guarded to prevent the operator's accidental contact therewith, during normal starting, mounting and operation of the machine.

Shutoff device:
- Shall be provided to stop operation of the motor or engine.
- Shall require manual and intentional reactivation to restart the motor or engine.
- All positions of the operating controls shall be clearly identified.
- The words, “Caution. Be sure the operating control(s) is in neutral before starting the engine,” or similar wording shall be clearly visible at an engine starting control point on self-propelled mowers.

Walk-behind and riding rotary mowers:
- The mower blade shall be enclosed except on the bottom and the enclosure shall extend to or below the lowest cutting point of the blade in the lowest blade position.

Guards that must be removed to install a catcher assembly shall comply with the following:
- Warning instructions shall be affixed to the mower near the opening stating that the mower shall not be used without either the catcher assembly or the guard in place.
- Catcher assembly or the guard shall be shipped and sold as part of the mower.
- The instruction manual shall state that the mower shall not be used without either the catcher assembly or the guard in place.
- The catcher assembly, when properly and completely installed, shall not create a condition which violates the limits given for the guarded opening.
- The word “Caution” or stronger wording, shall be placed on the mower at or near each discharge opening.
- Blade(s) shall stop rotating from the manufacturer's specified maximum speed within 15 seconds after declutching, or shutting off power.

Walk-behind rotary mowers:
- The horizontal angle of the opening(s) in the blade enclosure, intended for the discharge of grass, shall not contact the operator area.
- A positive upstop or latch shall be provided for the mower handle in the normal operating position(s).
- The upstop shall not be subject to unintentional disengagement during normal operation of the mower.
Riding rotary mowers:
- Opening(s) shall be placed so that grass or debris will not discharge directly toward any part of an operator seated in a normal operator position.


**WAGE AND HOUR DIVISION**
In addition to the OSHA standards, the United States Department of Labor, through its Wage and Hour Division, has rules regarding age limitations for operating certain types of equipment.

Regarding lawn mowing, Child Labor Bulletin 101, states that 14 and 15 year olds may not be employed in:

Occupations involved with the operating, tending, setting up, adjusting, cleaning, oiling or repairing or of ANY POWER-DRIVEN MACHINERY, including, but not limited to, lawnmowers, golf carts, all-terrain vehicles, trimmers, cutters, weed-eaters, edgers, food slicers, food grinders, food choppers, food processors, food cutters and food mixers.

Child Labor Bulletin 101 can be viewed at: http://www.dol.gov/whd/regs/compliance/childlabor101_text.htm#7. That bulletin also lists Hazardous Occupations (HOs) for non-agricultural employment of 16 and 17 year olds.

Individual states may also have age limits on lawn mower operators.

**General Safety Tips**

**KNOW YOUR EQUIPMENT**
- Thoroughly read the owner's manual
- Review it annually when the mowing season begins
- Maintain the unit as recommended by the manufacturer

**SAFETY FEATURES**
- Leave all safety features intact
- Do not operate a mower that has safety features disabled

**MOWING AREA**
- Clear the area to be mowed, remove sticks, stones, wire and other debris
- Set the blade high enough to prevent excessive debris from being thrown, particularly on rough terrain
- Keep children and pets out of the mowing area
- Cut grass only when conditions are safe with adequate daylight and when the grass is not wet or slippery

**PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT**
- Steel toe shoes
- Non-skid shoes
- Close-fitting pants and tops
- Safety glasses
- Hearing protection
Safe Mowing Practices

STARTING AND STOPPING
• Start mowers on clear, level and firm ground
• Learn how to stop the machine quickly
• Use a machine that stops running when the handle is released or you dismount from the seat

GENERAL
• Never leave a running mower unattended
• Never put hands or feet near moving parts
• If the mower becomes clogged, turn off the power before clearing the debris
• When cleaning, repairing or inspecting a gasoline-powered unit, disconnect the spark plug wire; on electric units, disconnect from the power source
• Do not fuel while the engine is running or is hot.

WALK-BEHIND MOWERS
• Be sure of your footing when starting
• Walk slowly
• Maneuver around obstacles carefully with secure footing
• Do not pull a walk-behind mower toward you
• Always mow sideways across slopes and banks, not up and down

RIDING MOWERS
• The potential for tipping or loss of control is always present - stay alert
• Reduce speed before making sharp turns
• Watch for dips, holes, bumps, sprinkler heads and other items that may be obscured by grass
• On slopes, mow up and down, not across
• Reduce speed on slopes and hills
• Avoid turns on hills and slopes
• Never carry passengers, including children

Summary

Lawn mowing, while a routine, ordinary task, does offer risks to the operator and those in the area. Remember to:

• Follow the OSHA rules for guarding.
• Know and maintain your equipment.
• Prepare the machine, yourself and the area for safe mowing.
• Learn and observe proper mowing techniques.
• Wear proper clothing and protective gear.
• Respect the machine’s power and potential to cause injury.

Contact your Continental Western Group Loss Control Representative for additional help with this or other safety topics.