

THE SAFE USE OF BRUSHCUTTERS



WorkCover
TASMANIA



BRUSHCUTTERS CAN BE DANGEROUS

Every year many farm and forestry workers, local government workers and gardeners are injured in brushcutter accidents.

Brushcutters can fling up objects (such as sticks and stones) at high speed, which can injure the operator and anybody who is close by.

The rotating blade or cutting cord can also cause serious injuries if it comes into contact with your face, hands, legs or feet.

If you use a brushcutter often, there are other risks. The noise of the brushcutter can lead to permanent hearing loss; the vibration can cause permanent damage to the hands; and fuel spillage, hot sparks or smoking can be a fire hazard.

BRUSHCUTTER TYPES

There are three basic types of brushcutter, each designed for a particular operation. Make sure you use your brushcutter only for jobs it can handle.

If your brushcutter is fitted with a steel circular saw blade, it can be used for cutting shrubs and small trees (less than 150 mm diameter) (see figure 1).

If your brushcutter has a rubber, plastic or steel cutter blade, it is suitable for clearing grass, weeds or pasture (see figure 2).

If you have a brushcutter with a synthetic cutting cord, or with pivot mounted thermoplastic blades, it is suitable for trimming or mowing grass and weeds. Electric brushcutters should be fitted with a safety switch (also known as a residual current device) to protect you from electric shock (see figure 3).

All brushcutters must be fitted with a blade guard to protect you from flying objects (see figure 4).

Figure 1

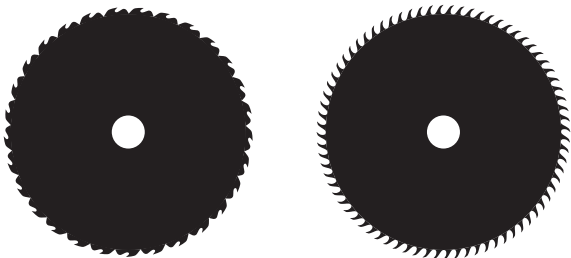


Figure 2

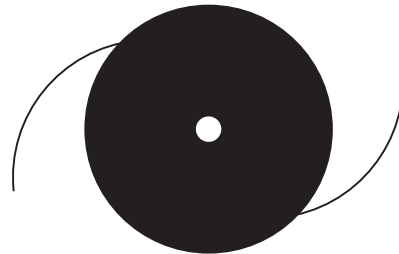


Figure 3

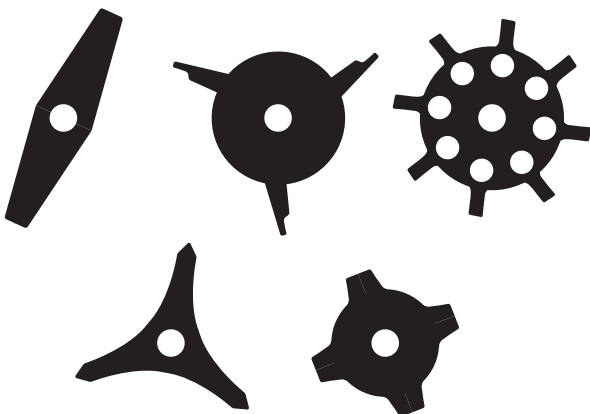
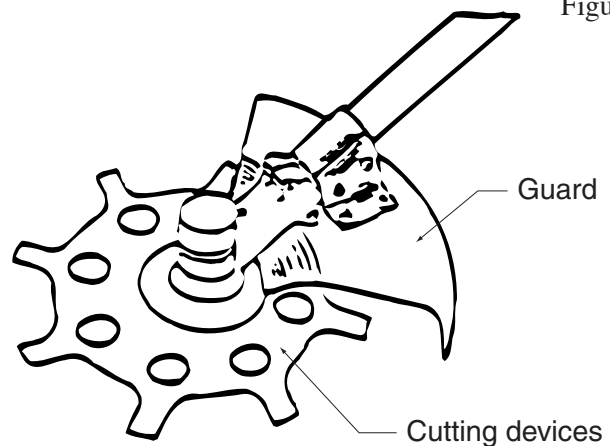


Figure 4

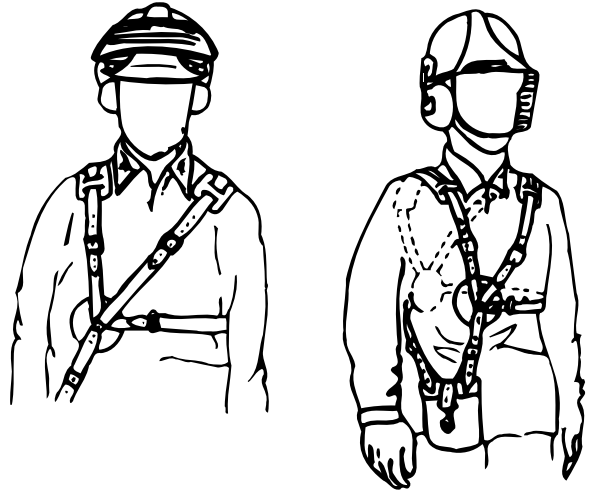


MAINTAINING YOUR BRUSHCUTTER

Use your brushcutter only if it is in a safe operating condition. Ask the manufacturer if your brushcutter complies with Australian Standard 3575–1995 *Clearing saws, brushcutters and grass trimmers – safety requirements*. Read your owners' manual and follow its maintenance and service instructions. Learn how to stop the engine quickly in any emergency.

Before starting work, check that:

- your brushcutter is clean and free of grass and leaves
- the cutting blade or cord is not bent, cracked, dull or worn. Damaged cutting blades and worn mounting components are major hazards
- the safety harness (with larger model brushcutters) fits so that your shoulders, arms and hands are relaxed and your back is straight.



PERSONAL SAFETY EQUIPMENT

Your clothing should be comfortable for the temperature conditions you are working in. You must wear approved:

- safety helmet when brushcutting the bush
- ear muffs or ear plugs to minimise the risk of permanent hearing damage
- eye and face protection (such as goggles or a visor) to protect your eyes against flying objects or sawdust
- leg protection
- steel capped safety boots with a non-slip tread or metal spikes
- safety gloves or mittens to keep your hands warm and dry to prevent vibration white finger.

Make sure you have a first aid kit available, and a working knowledge of first aid procedures. If possible, work within hailing distance of another person in case first aid is needed.



STARTING WORK

Before starting work:

- plan sufficient rest breaks to recover from fatigue and to prevent developing “vibration white finger” (also known as Raynaud's phenomenon)
- make sure other people and animals are kept at least 10 metres from the brushcutter
- clear the area you'll be working in of stones, sticks, wire and other objects
- ensure that you can finish the job in good daylight.

To start your brushcutter:

- place the brushcutter on firm ground
- clear away any obstructions, especially near the front of the cutting blade
- place one hand on the machine and operate the starter with the other hand.

USING YOUR BRUSHCUTTER

Don't let your attention slip while you're using the brushcutter. Make sure you keep a firm grip on the machine with both hands and keep the blade or cutting cord away from your body.

Make sure your footing is solid, and your posture is well balanced at all times. Don't cut above shoulder level.

It is dangerous to force the brushcutter at excessive speeds, so don't cut at a pace that the brushcutter can't handle.

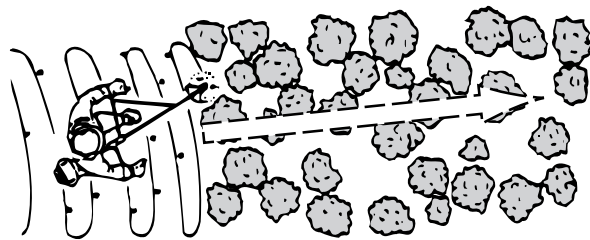
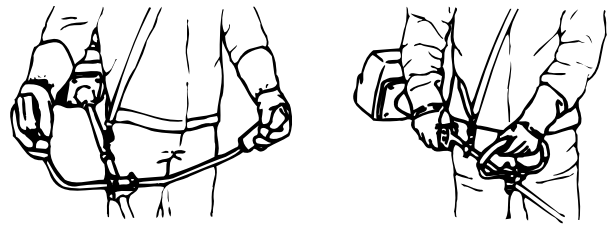
Difficult and overgrown terrain, and slippery wet conditions can pose an extra hazard. Take special care in these situations. Watch out for tree stumps, roots and ditches that might trip you. And beware of stones and other objects that may be thrown up.

Don't use the electric trimmers in the rain or in damp conditions as there is a danger of electric shock.

Do warm up exercises before starting work, and take regular rest breaks. Exposure to constant vibration, particularly during cold weather, may cause numbness or "vibration white finger". If your fingers start to tingle or feel numb, see a doctor.

Exposure to the high noise levels emitted by brushcutters can cause permanent hearing damage. Wear suitable hearing protection that fits you properly.

Australian Standards AS/N25 3576: 1998 *Clearing saws, brushcutters and grass trimmers – guide to safe working practices* provides further guidelines.



PREVENTING FIRES

- Don't smoke in work areas.
- Turn off your engine and let your brushcutter cool before refuelling.
- Refuel in a clear area and take care not to spill fuel.
- Move at least 3 metres away from the fuelling area before restarting your brushcutter.
- Don't use a brushcutter that is backfiring, missing or damaged. Have it repaired immediately.
- Don't leave the brushcutter idling when not in use.
- Store fuel in a cool place and in a suitable container.
- Keep an approved fire extinguisher handy, as well as a rake or shovel and a piece of canvas to smother a small flame.

TRAINING

You should be trained in:

- safe working techniques (including working in unusual hazardous conditions)
- basic information on the particular brushcutter, its controls, attachments and components, design, capacity, stability and limitations
- correct stopping and starting techniques
- cleaning and servicing
- correctly using the harness and handles
- selecting, maintaining and correctly using protective clothing and equipment
- first aid.

LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES

If you are an employer, you have a duty of care under the *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995* to ensure that your brushcutter is properly maintained and used according to the manufacturer's specifications; and that your workers are adequately trained and wearing protective gear.

If you are a worker, you also have a duty under this Act to make sure you operate the brushcutter according to your employer's instructions.

If you are a self-employed, you also have a duty under this Act to make sure you and others are not exposed to risks arising from the work you are doing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This guide uses material prepared by WorkCover New South Wales and Standards Australia.

Please note

This information is for guidance only and is not to be taken as an expression of the law. It should be read in conjunction with the *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995*, the *Workplace Health and Safety Regulations 1998* and any other relevant legislation. Copies of the legislation can be purchased from Print Applied Technology: call (03) 6233 3289 or freecall 1800 030 940. It is also available on the Internet at www.thelaw.tas.gov.au

This guide was produced by staff from WorkCover Tasmania and Workplace Standards Tasmania.

We welcome your feedback on this guide.

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