

## Landscaper Nearly Loses Finger Checking Underneath Mower Deck

**Industry:** Landscape Services

**Release Date:** April 13, 2012

**Task:** Checking Under Mower Deck

**Occupation:** Landscaper

A 22-year-old landscaper nearly severed his finger while checking to see if wet grass was building up under the mower he was operating. The worker was concerned that the blades were having difficulty cutting the thick, wet grass he was working on. Using the power take off (PTO) switch he shut down the mower in order to inspect the blades. After waiting about 45-60 seconds, he reached under the mower deck to check for grass build-up. The 48-inch mower blades had not come to a complete stop and one of his fingers was struck by the blades, fracturing and nearly severing it. The employee first began working at the company as a weed-eater operator four months earlier. Training consisted of reading the company's safety policies, being shown how to operate the weed-eater, and being shadowed by an experienced worker for a couple of hours. After operating the weed-eater for two months, the worker was promoted to cutting lawns. The worker was provided training on how to properly operate the various lawn mowers and was again shadowed by a more experienced worker; training did not include how to check for problems under the mower deck.



Photo of worker's arm after surgery

On previous occasions he had checked under the mower deck and in those instances the blades had stopped spinning within 45 seconds. The worker said he was an experienced operator of the lawn mower involved in the incident and did not know why the blades didn't stop this time. After his injury the victim was unable to use his hand for a month. He had to stop living on his own and began depending on others to help him with everyday tasks such as showering and getting dressed. He also struggled to cover living expenses during the month he was out of work. After four months, the worker still did not have full range of motion in his finger and had developed a dull, throbbing pain on cold or rainy days.

### Employer Requirements

- Protect workers from rotating parts. See WAC 296-807-16020(3).
- Make sure the operator stops engine before unclogging the grass discharge chute or cleaning the mower. See WAC 296-807-16020(5).
- Establish, supervise, and enforce effective rules that lead to a safe and healthy work environment. See WAC 296-800-11035.

### Recommendations

- Never use your hands or any other body part to unclog or clean under a lawn mower deck. Use tools designed to clean under lawn mower decks, spray down with a hose, or use a stick to clean under or remove grass build-up.
- Keep all body parts away from mower blades until you are positive the blades are no longer moving. Ensure that the mower is turned off and cannot inadvertently start before performing any work on the unit.
- Do not perform any maintenance or inspect any equipment unless you have been trained on how to safely do so. Ask for training.
- Operators of lawn mowers and other heavy equipment should read and understand the operator's manual. Manuals for lawn mowers often have directions for checking mower blades.

### Resources

- The University of Arkansas offers a free lawn mower safety guide at: <http://bit.ly/xhEm65>
- Check out the free lawn and garden safety checklist provided by West Virginia University at: <http://bit.ly/lqGJpl>
- Free workplace safety and health consultations are available from L&I at: [www.SafetyConsult.Lni.wa.gov](http://www.SafetyConsult.Lni.wa.gov)

### Need More information?

Please contact Eric Jalonen, Prevention Specialist at 360-902-6751 or email [Eric.Jalonen@Lni.wa.gov](mailto:Eric.Jalonen@Lni.wa.gov)