

Cleaning Up After a Hurricane: Safety Comes First!¹

Eliana Kampf, Astrid Delgado, Carol Lehtola, Mary L. Duryea, Ryan Klein, and Alyssa Vinson²

General Safety Tips

Do Not Work Alone

Cleanup is dangerous. Always work with a partner.

Assemble a Well-Stocked First-Aid Kit

Learn how to use it and keep it nearby.

Avoid Overexertion and Stay Hydrated

Overexertion is the most common cause of injury. Avoid lifting over 50 pounds. Remember to lift with your legs and not your back and drink plenty of fluids.

Homeowner: Stay Safe!

Homeowners are seriously injured trying to do their own tree work. It is always a good idea to consult a professional before undertaking any major restoration or removal. Professional tree workers are required by law to wear personal protective equipment: hard hat, gloves, goggles, hearing protection, chaps, and appropriate footwear (see the *Personal Protective Equipment* section). If you decide to do some of the cleanup yourself, remember to follow these guidelines:



Figure 1. Homeowners can clear debris to help professionals perform their specialized work.
Credit: UF/IFAS Communications

- Do not use a chain saw if you are not experienced in operating it or if you are not physically fit.
- If you *must* use a chain saw, work only on the ground.

- Never do any tree work that involves felling trees, climbing of any kind, or using ropes. Get a professional to help you with these situations.

Create a Safe Work Zone

Survey the Site

Identify potential hazards and discuss where there is potential for injuries. Agree on communication signals before you start working.

Mark a Perimeter Around the Work Area

Use tape or cones to mark an area that is two times the height of the tree and keep non-workers safely outside this area. More distance is required when felling trees or dropping limbs.

Stay Away from Downed Power Lines

Call a professional to verify that the lines are not transmitting electricity.



Figure 2. Appoint a flagger or use barricades and warning signs to control traffic or onlookers.
Credit: Adobe Photo Stock

Chain Saw Safety

Chain saws are considered the most dangerous hand tools available. The risk of injury increases during hurricane cleanup when chain saws are widely used to remove trees and branches. Use these guidelines to avoid injuries.

Keep Both Hands on the Handles

Many chain saw injuries affect the hands and are the result of using the saw with just one hand.

Follow Manual Instructions Carefully

This will ensure safe operation and proper equipment maintenance.

Take the Time to Do the Job Right

Most injuries affect the legs and feet and are the result of aggressive or careless cutting. Take breaks when needed, because most injuries occur when workers are fatigued.

Wear the Appropriate Personal Protective Equipment

Appropriate equipment includes protective glasses and face shields, protective head gear, hearing protection, gloves, leg chaps, heavy work boots (see Personal Protective Equipment section for details).

Cut at Waist Level or Below

Chain saw injuries to the head often result from making overhead cuts (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Cut at waist level or below to avoid injuries. Credit: UF/IFAS Communications

Take Extra Care When Cutting Limbs

Limbs that are bent, twisted, or caught under another object may snap back and hit you or pinch the saw.

Shut Off Equipment

Turn off chain saw when fueling it, carrying it a distance of more than 100 feet, or carrying it through slippery areas or heavy brush.

Be Sure the Chain Saw Operator Is Aware of Your Presence Before You Approach

Chain saw operators often cannot see or hear the approach of other people.

Do Not Cut with the Upper Tip of the Chain Saw

Kickback occurs when the upper tip of the guide bar contacts an object and causes the saw to come straight back at the operator. It happens so fast that there is no time for reaction.

To prevent kickback, cut using the part of the bar closest to the engine. Watch where the tip is at all times and do not let it contact the ground or other branches (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Do not cut with the upper tip of the saw; contact with other branches can cause kickback. Credit: UF/IFAS Communications

Personal Protective Equipment

The correct use of personal protective equipment reduces the likelihood of injury by covering key areas of the body.



Figure 5. All tree workers should wear the appropriate clothing and footwear. Credit: UF/IFAS Communications; labels: Alyssa Vinson

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² Eliana Kampf, former urban forester, School of Forest, Fisheries, and Geomatics Sciences; Astrid Delgado, former urban forester and landscaping specialist, School of Forest, Fisheries, and Geomatics Sciences; Carol Lehtola, former associate professor and Extension agricultural safety specialist, Department of Agricultural and Biological Engineering; Mary L. Duryea, professor emeritus, School of Forest, Fisheries, and Geomatics Sciences; and former associate dean for research, director of Florida Agricultural Experiment Station; Ryan Klein, assistant professor, arboriculture, School of Forest, Fisheries, and Geomatics Sciences; Alyssa Vinson, Extension agent II, M.S., urban forestry, UF/IFAS Extension Hillsborough County; UF/IFAS Extension, Gainesville, FL 32611.

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