

## **Pruning Safety**

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Plant and tree pruning is a necessary part of many agricultural-related operations. And although pruning may seem like a simple task, pruners need to be aware of the safety issues and hazards associated with pruning activities. Before pruning begins, workers should receive training in pruning hazards; safe pruning techniques; safe tool handling; ladder safety; and the proper personal protection to be worn.

Above all, pruners should be dressed for protection. Personal protective equipment like protective eyewear, gloves, headwear, shoes, long-sleeved shirts, and pants help shield workers from many pruning hazards. Workers should be appropriately dressed for the day's weather conditions with light-colored, thin clothing for the hot days and warmer layers for cold or wet days. And for all outdoor work, adequate sunscreen and a wide-brimmed hat provides protection against the sun's harmful rays.

One hazard of pruning is from the branches or foliage removed during the pruning process. As many pruning activities require workers to get in close to the plant or tree to see where to make the best cut, an eye could be poked or cut by a ricocheting branch, flying debris or sharp twig. So eye protection, such as safety glasses or face shields, is an essential part of pruning equipment. To protect against other cuts and scrapes from foliage, workers should wear long-sleeved shirts, neck scarves, and long pants. In some cases, a dust mask may be necessary to prevent inhaling airborne particles during the cutting, grinding or sawing of limbs and foliage. Workers are also advised to wear hard hats and sturdy or steel toed shoes to protect against falling limbs and debris.

Another hazard of pruning is from the cutting tools required to do the job. Tools include pruning knives and saws, anvils and scissor shears, manual and electric hedge shears, branch loppers, pole pruners and power saws. These tools have common hazards—sharp blades and pinching points. Workers can protect themselves from cutting injuries by practicing safe tool handling techniques, maintaining and storing tools properly, and wearing protective gloves. Well-fitting gloves can also provide a better tool grip and prevent blisters, cuts or puncture wounds.

Because tree and orchard pruners often work at heights, they should be trained in ladder safety, including proper climbing techniques, ladder placement, and ladder maintenance. Shoes with good tread provide traction for climbing. Tree pruners should also note the location and height of electrical lines and avoid touching them with foliage, pruning equipment or lift equipment.

Other general safety tips for pruners include using proper lifting techniques; avoiding awkward postures; using ear plugs when working around power tools; drinking plenty of liquids to prevent heat exhaustion and dehydration; taking short, frequent breaks from repetitive tasks; and stretching before, during and after work. Sometimes bees, wasps, snakes, and ticks may be encountered while pruning, so workers should carefully observe areas for signs of insects or reptiles and avoid or take extra care in those locations. Lastly, maintaining good health and overall strength can reduce injuries from the physical labor of pruning. If workers prune with safety in mind, they can snip hazards in the bud.