

# Staying Safe Around Lawn Mowers

Mowing the yard is often one of the first responsibilities given to youth. Whether using a push mower or a riding mower, the chore can teach kids important skills about safety and respect.

Although smaller in size than most farm equipment the potential for injury is still present. The moving blades and operating engine make lawn mowers dangerous items if not used cautiously and with respect. Objects thrown from a mower discharge chute can travel at 200 miles per hour. In 1997, data from the U.S. Consumer Product Commission showed that over 60,000 operators and bystanders required emergency room treatment for mower-related injuries. Annually, approximately 75 fatalities and 20,000 injuries were caused by *riding* mowers alone. Statistics also show that one out of every five deaths involve children.

Before assigning a child the task of mowing the yard, take the time to teach him or her the importance of safe operation. A few simple guidelines and operation instructions could help to avoid a tragic situation. Remember, it is important to be a good role model.

Consider a youth's physical and cognitive ability when determining at what age he or she is able to mow the yard safely.

## ***Ask yourself these questions:***

- If using a riding mower, can the youth reach the necessary controls without moving from the seat?
- If using a walk behind mower, does the youth have the physical strength to mow the yard without putting themselves at risk?
- Has the youth been trained in proper operation of the mower, including fueling, starting, and trouble shooting?
- Does the youth have safety as a top priority?
- Has the youth observed safe lawn mowing behavior by an adult?

## **Following are tips to help make lawn mowing a rewarding and safe chore for children.**

- Explain to children the dangers of objects flying from a rotating blade. Encourage children to help pick up litter and debris in the yard before mowing, this practice allows children to feel a part of the operation without putting them in danger. When actually mowing make sure young children are away from the mowing location.
- Provide and encourage the use of proper personal protective equipment and clothing such as: eye and ear protection, long pants and sturdy shoes with traction.

## **Teach safe operation skills when using the lawn mower.**

- Mow across slopes when using a walk behind mower.
- Mow up and down slopes when using a riding mower.
- Mow dry grass.
- Never point the discharge chute at anyone.
- Never drive or push a running mower over gravel.

## **Teach safe servicing of mowers**

- Shut off the engine before servicing.
- Always fill the gas tank outside of any buildings and only when the engine is cool.
- Keep the engine free of oil spills, grass, and leaves.

Mowing the yard can be a big step in teaching responsibility to children. Caution needs to be taken to ensure that this a safe experience. Learning to use a mower properly before children are given the responsibility of working on large, powerful farm equipment may teach them important concepts about safety and responsibility.

