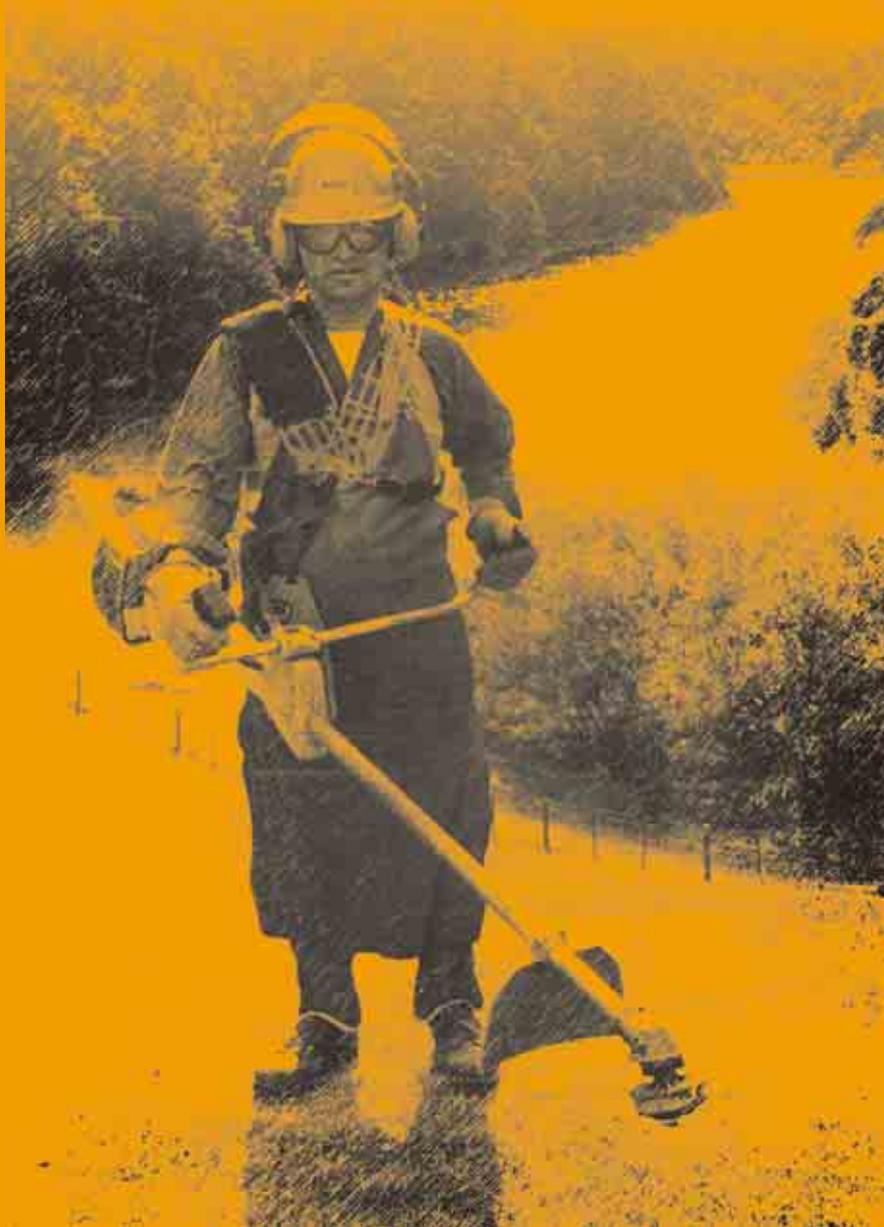


## SAFETY BULLETIN 5

# THE SAFE USE OF BRUSHCUTTERS



It's working **WORKPLACE  
SAFE**





## BRUSHCUTTERS CAN BE DANGEROUS

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

Brushcutters can fling up objects at high speed, such as sticks and stones and these can injure both 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. And the vibration can cause permanent damage to the hands. Fuel spillage, hot sparks or smoking can be a fire hazard.

This bulletin is a guide to using your brushcutter safely. You'll find information about the correct use of your brushcutter, a check list of the protective clothing you should wear, and tips on safe work methods.

## GETTING TO KNOW YOUR BRUSHCUTTER

There are three basic types of brushcutter, each designed for a particular operation. Make sure that 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). Fig. 1

If your brushcutter has a rubber, plastic or steel cutter blade, it is suitable for clearing grass, weeds or pasture. Fig. 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 either an earth leakage circuit breaker (ELCB) or isolated transformer to protect you from electric shock. Fig. 3

All brushcutters must be fitted with a blade guard to protect you from flying objects. Fig. 4

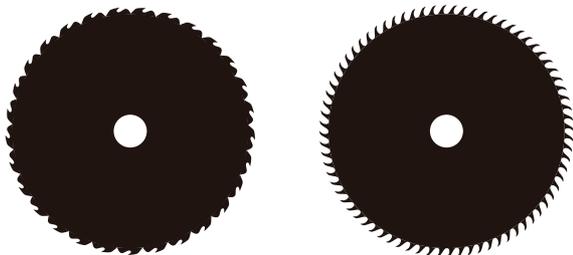


Fig. 1

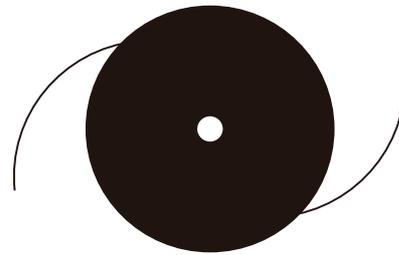


Fig. 2

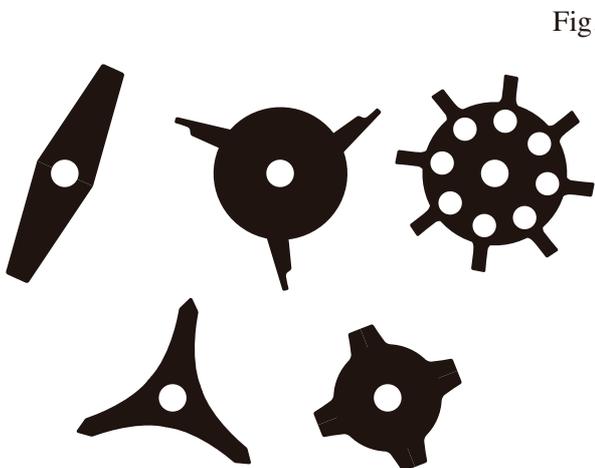


Fig. 3

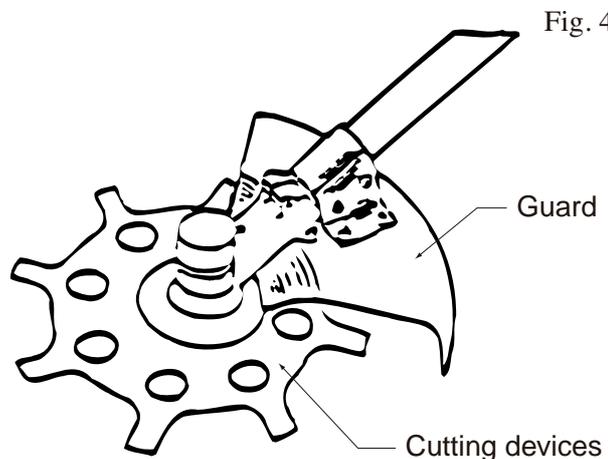


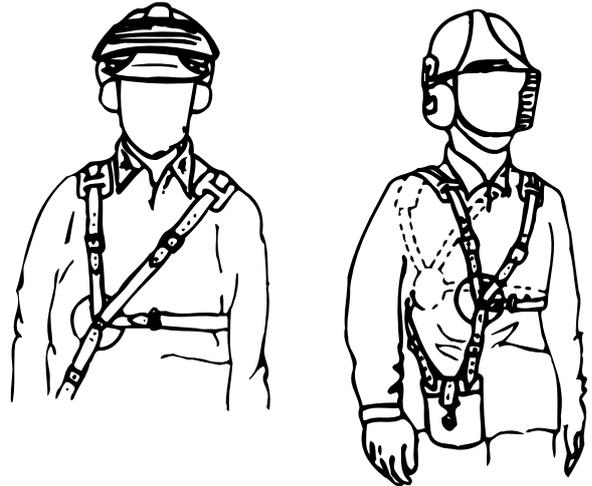
Fig. 4

## 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 AS3575. 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 in which you are working. 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 (goggles or a visor) to protect against flying objects or sawdust;
- leg protection;
- steel capped safety boots with a non-slip tread or metal spikes; and
- safety gloves or mittens to keep your hands warm and dry to prevent vibration white finger.

Make sure that a first aid kit is available and that you have 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 for recovery from fatigue and to prevent the development of vibration white finger;
- make sure that other people or animals are kept at least 10 metres from the brushcutter;
- clear the area in which you will be working of stones, sticks, wire or other objects; and
- ensure that you can finish the job in good daylight.

To start our 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 THE BRUSHCUTTER

Don't let our 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.

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

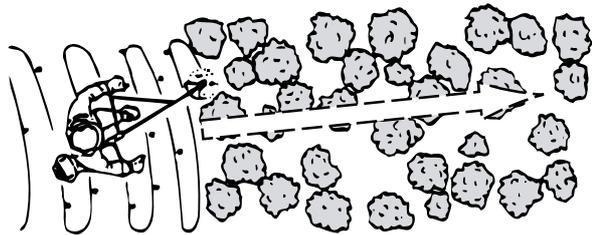
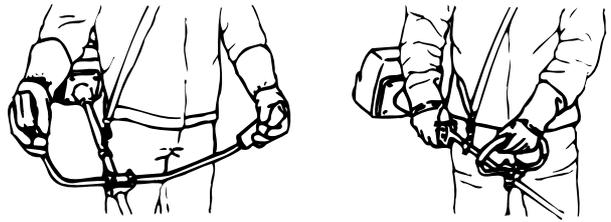
It is dangerous to force the brushcutter at excessive speeds, so don't cut at a pace that the brushcutter can't handle.

Difficult and overgrown terrain, or 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 (Raynards phenomenon). 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.



## 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

Operators of brushcutters should be trained in:

- safe working techniques;
- operating conditions in all areas including abnormal or 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;
- correct adjustment of the harness and handles;
- selection, maintenance and correct use of protective clothing and equipment; and
- first aid.

## **LEGISLATION AND STANDARDS**

Common sense and a sound knowledge of brushcutter safety will prevent a lot of accidents happening. Legislation, however, provides for certain safety requirements to be met to prevent people being injured.

The *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995* places a duty of care upon occupiers to ensure the health, safety and welfare of all workers at work. It requires occupiers to provide such information, instruction, training and supervision as may be necessary to ensure health and safety at work.

*Australian Standards Brushcutters – Guide to Safe Working Practices (AS3576-1988) and Brushcutters – Safety Requirements (AS3575-1988)* provide further guidelines for using your brushcutter safely.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:**

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