

The Safety Site

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Snowblower Safety

Recreational Safety takes Responsibility & Control

Yearly, thousands of people suffer serious damage to their fingers or hands due to the improper handling of snow blowers. Usually, the tips of the fingers need to be amputated, so taking precautions to prevent injuries is crucial.

Injuries usually occur when the snow is heavy, wet, or has accumulated several inches. The snow clogs the exit chute of the machine, and the person using the machine tries to unclog this using his/her hand. Unfortunately, **the blades still can rotate when the machine is off**, and these will cut whatever is in their path.

Stay safe this season with these snow blower safety tips:

Clear the way. Before it even snows, clear the pathways you intend to use. Snow can hide objects that could clog the snow blower's chute, cause damage to the machine, or even injure people nearby. Remove doormats, sleds, boards, wires, and other debris.

How to keep your snow blower from clogging

- Work at a safe, but brisk pace. The faster the blades and pace, the less likely the snow will stick.
- If heavy, wet snow is anticipated, consider snow blowing several times during the snowfall. Heavy snow is more likely to clog.
- Some people spray the blades and chute with cooking oil spray to alleviate.

If your snow blower clogs:

- **Turn it OFF!**
- Disengage the clutch.
- Wait five seconds after shutting the machine off to allow the impeller blades to stop rotating.
- **ALWAYS use a stick or broom handle to clear the impacted snow. DO NOT assume that you are safe just because the power switch is off.**
- NEVER put your hand down the chute or around the blades.
- Keep all shields in place. DO NOT REMOVE the safety devices on the machine.
- Keep your hands and feet away from all moving parts.

Remember:

- Protect your eyes from flying debris by wearing goggles or glasses, especially if you are unclogging the machine.
- Stay focused while snow blowing.
- Wear boots with traction to avoid slipping.
- Do not drink alcohol or use narcotics before using your snow blower!
- When being moved or picked up, snow blower should be turned off, spark plug disconnected, and unplugged. Do not try to lift the machine from the bottom, even if it is not running. The blades are sharp enough to cause serious injury.
- Never allow children to operate or be near the machine while in use.

If you suffer a snow blower injury, seek medical attention immediately, even for seemingly small injuries. Even small cuts can be infected and may need antibiotics. Before you seek treatment, clean a cut well with soap and water and cover with a bandage. More severe injuries can lead to multiple finger amputations. Save any amputated body part in a sealed plastic bag wrapped in moist gauze or cloth and place that bag in another bag of ice. Go immediately to the closest emergency room. It may not always be possible to reattach an amputated part. The further the injury is toward the fingertip, the less likely it could or should be reattached.

Courtesy of American Society for Surgery of the Hand & Consumer Reports