



Guideline 2.3.5

Use of Pole saws

The ACT Rural Fire Service Chief Officer has issued this Guideline under Section 38(1) of the *Emergency Act 2004* – A Chief Officer may determine standards and protocols.

Purpose

This Guideline is to inform members of the ACT Rural Fire Service (ACTRFS), both volunteer and staff, of the Service expectations on the use of pole saws.

Scope

This Guideline is applicable to all personnel from the ACT Rural Fire Service, including staff and volunteer members.

Background

The ACTRFS has procured a range of Stihl and Husqvarna Pole saws to enhance our capability to support the State Emergency Service (SES) address storm damage.

Feedback from crews assisting with SES storm damage jobs indicated that availability of a pole saw would assist in closing a significant number of jobs where suspended tree branches cannot be safely accessed from the ground with traditional chain saws.

Application

The following section of this Guideline outlines the maintenance, start-up, operation, PPE and shutdown processes that should be followed when using pole saws at incidents.

Pole saws must only be used by ACTRFS members with a current chainsaw ticket and who have completed an induction on the tool.

Maintenance

Like any chainsaw, ongoing effectiveness requires regular maintenance. Sharpen the chain, remove the bar and blow out chips, check fuel and oil.

Start-up

Perform pre-start checks:

- Check for any damage to the pole saw
- Ensure fuel and bar oil caps seal correctly, check levels
- Check the bar is secure
- Check chain tension
- Select a suitable site for fuelling and starting the machine as per the recommendations in the operator's manual.

Position the pole saw on the ground, start it and allow it to warm up. On rough ground it is preferable to have the cutting head slightly raised or resting on something to stop the chain cutting into the ground.

Operation

A risk assessment is essential before use. Consider utilities, exclusion zones, public access and noise.

There are 2 major causes of injury from pole saw use:

1. Falling branches
2. Electrical wires

Plan your escape route and make sure it is clear.

Position yourself so you are not looking into the sun.

PPE

Minimum requirements:

- Helmet
- Eye protection
- Hearing protection
- Chaps
- Safety boots
- HiVis clothing

Operator tips

A common issue is the pole saw getting trapped due to incorrect assessment of compression and failing to address it first. (It can be difficult to undercut branches, but it is more difficult to safely retrieve a trapped pole saw).

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Never stand directly underneath the branch being cut. Generally, position the pole saw at less than 60 degrees to horizontal. (For a 5m long pole saw this will mean cutting branches at no more than 4m high.)

Do not hold the pole saw above chest height to get extra reach as this greatly reduces your control of the tool.

Start small and work your way back towards the trunk where possible. (Reduce the weight of the branch.)

Pole saws are primarily designed to remove lateral branches (not upright stems). It is almost impossible to make a correct pruning cut on upright growth and these normally result in a spear cut which will not be able to compartmentalise correctly.

Kickback is surprisingly common if you try to position the pole saw with the chain moving.

Allow the weight of the pole saw to make the cut, do not add pressure. A shoulder strap may also be used to assist with the weight of the pole saw during prolonged use.

Pole saws enhance your vertical reach. They are not designed to cut branches on the ground.

Plan for the direction the cut piece of tree will swing and fall. When cutting a free end, the cut piece will normally fall toward and past the pole saw by up to 2m dependent on the height and thickness of the piece being cut. A slow cut allows the branch to partially fall while still attached, which will minimise the amount of swing.

To allow branches to free fall, always cut the lower branches first and prune heavy branches (large diameter) into several controllable pieces.

Cutting large branches may require cutting from both directions. The final cut should ALWAYS be from the safest side.

Shut down

Ensure chain has stopped moving before bringing the pole saw head down to ground level.

Control the descent of the saw carefully.

Ensure the chain guard is fitted prior to relocation of the pole saw.

Secure the pole saw appropriately in/on your vehicle.

Responsibilities

Members (including volunteer and staff members)	Must comply with instructions on use of ACT RFS property and equipment. Regularly check serviceability of PPE before use.
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	<p>May not use ACT RFS resources for non-official use, unless approved by the RFS CO or delegate.</p> <p>Report damaged equipment to Brigade Equipment Officer and if unserviceable tag the pole saw to prevent use.</p>
Equipment Officer	Report all faulty, lost or damaged equipment to ACT RFS HQ.
Brigade Executives	<p>Ensure only authorised use is made of all ACT RFS resources, including property, fire-fighting and station equipment, clothing, PPE, PPC and vehicles.</p> <p>Ensure appropriate PPC is used for all active incidents, training and fire suppression activities.</p>
ACT RFS Director, Operations	Ensure appropriate claims are made for damaged, lost or faulty equipment and replacements organised.
ACT RFS Chief Officer (CO) ACT RFS Duty Officer (DO)	<p>Approve non-official use of RFS resources where appropriate.</p> <p>Approve use of RFS resources outside the ACT where appropriate.</p>

Version history

Author	Version	Version Approval Date	Summary of Changes
Steve Huntley	0.1	10/01/2022	Initial draft

Approved by

Name	Title/Role	Signature	Date
Rohan Scott	CO ACT RFS		17/01/2022

Document Owner

Position	Section
Director Operations	ACT Rural Fire Service

Next review due: 17/01/2024

Related documents

Document name
1.2.1 Using PPE and PPC Standard Operating Procedure

Signed documents will be scanned and filed in TRIM.

