Unfortunately a lot of hurricane related injuries come after the storm has passed, particularly during the cleanup process. Working in and around trees can be very dangerous work, especially if you are unaccustomed to working with damaged or fallen timber. Large jobs should be left to the professionals. However, if you plan to do the cleanup yourself, please follow a few basic safety guidelines.

Safety is an attitude and requires a conscious identification of potential hazards. You are the first line of defense to prevent accidents and need to always be aware of your surroundings. Protect yourself first and begin by wearing the right type of clothing and footwear appropriate for the work conditions.

Refrain from wearing loose fitting clothing and jewelry, as these can become a hazard by getting caught in equipment. Head protection (hard hat) and eye protection shall be worn when working with trees. Also, if operating loud machinery for a prolonged period of time, such as a chain saw, hearing protection should be used.

Never work alone. To observe hazards and to help with difficult tasks, it's always better to have someone else on the jobsite. It also helps to have someone stabilize the ladders and to look out for falling limbs, while you are doing the tree work.

Before performing any tree work, always look up. Look for any electrical hazards that may exist. Be careful of all utility lines. Leave extensive pruning around power lines to power companies. Wet limbs or dirt or soil-soaked control ropes on pruning equipment can be hazardous around these lines, as well as, pruning equipment with metal handles.

Clear the area of any other debris before beginning to saw limbs or trees. Determine the direction the tree will fall. Are there any potential targets around the tree? Targets are anything that the tree or branch may fall on that will cause damage. This can be a house, car, fence, shed, or even a person. Also, do not allow trees to fall onto other tree branches, as this may cause additional branches to fail. Always plan an escape route in case the tree or branch falls in a different direction than planned.

Using chain saws to clear debris after the hurricanes cause many serious injuries. To avoid harm, follow these simple directions:

- Always keep both hands on the chain saw handles.
- Cut below your head. Never cut over your head.
- Cut with the lower edge of the saw blade whenever possible.
- Never cutting with the tip of the saw. It may kickback and cause injury.
- Watch out when cutting limbs or branches, which are bent. They may snap back and hit you.
- Let the chain saw do the work. Don't try to force the saw.
- Use a sharp saw.
- Shut off motor, even when you are moving only a few feet.
- Remember that you can't shout or hear warnings when the saw is running, so have a plan in place before you start.

Remember that safety begins with you and should be the first thing you think of before beginning a task. Always observe safety precautions to prevent injury or death. If ever in doubt of doing something, don't. It may be best to leave it to the professionals. For more information on tree safety and tree pruning, please contact the Osceola County Master Gardeners at (321) 697-3000. They are available Monday thru Friday.
from 10am to 2pm.

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