

## **Park Valley Church Disaster Relief Team**

### *Supporting Chainsaw crews during disaster relief efforts*

The Park Valley Church Disaster Relief Team is forbidden to operate chainsaws regardless of training, experience, or host team insurance coverage while being supported by Park Valley Church during a deployment. Volunteers desiring to operate chainsaws should consider self-deploying independent of Park Valley Church.

The following Job Aid describes the hazards, and best practices of operating in close proximity of supporting chain saw operators.

#### **Scope of Task:**

Volunteers assist chainsaw crews by clearing debris, moving cut tree limbs, and removing brush after wind-driven disasters like tornadoes or hurricanes. Volunteers work near operating chainsaws and must handle trees, brush, and other debris, presenting significant safety hazards.

#### **Hazards and Risk Mitigation:**

##### *1. Proximity to Chainsaws*

- Hazards: Chainsaw kickback, flying debris, and accidental contact with the chain can cause severe injuries.

- Mitigation:

- Maintain a safe distance from the chainsaw operator (at least two tree lengths away).
- Stay out of the direct path of the chain and operator's movement.
- Only approach the saw operator after they have powered down the chainsaw.

##### *2. Chainsaw Malfunctions*

- Hazards: Chains coming off the saw, blade malfunctions, or mechanical failures can endanger bystanders.

- Mitigation:

- Position to the side of the operator within the peripheral line of sight. Be on the alert for communication gestures by the chainsaw operator.
- Be ready to pivot out of harm's way in the event a dangerous condition develops.
- Volunteers must stay alert to any unusual noise or malfunction and back away immediately if something seems wrong.

##### *3. Fallen Trees Under Spring Tension*

- Hazards: Fallen or partially fallen trees may be under extreme pressure (spring tension). Cutting can release this tension suddenly, causing the tree to snap or shift unexpectedly.

- Mitigation:

- Volunteers should never stand near or on a tree being cut. Stay clear until the crew confirms it is safe.

- Chainsaw operators should communicate cutting plans to the ground crew, specifying where and when they will cut.
- Stay out of the potential path of movement when tension is released.

#### *4. Noise and Debris*

- Hazards: Chainsaws produce high noise levels, potentially damaging hearing. Cutting trees and brush can send debris flying, leading to eye or skin injuries.
- Mitigation:
  - Always wear hearing protection (earplugs or earmuffs).
  - Wear eye protection (goggles or safety glasses) to shield against debris.
  - Clear the work area of unnecessary personnel before any cutting begins.

#### *5. Poison Ivy, Poison Oak, and Poison Sumac*

- Hazards: These plants, often found in brush and around trees, can cause severe skin irritation, rashes, and allergic reactions.
  - Poison Ivy: Three-pointed leaves, often glossy and grows as a vine or shrub.
  - Poison Oak: Similar to poison ivy, but its leaves resemble oak leaves, and it grows as a shrub. Avoid all fuzzy vines – they are all poison oak!
  - Poison Sumac: Grows as a small tree or tall shrub with 7-13 smooth-edged leaflets.
- Mitigation:
  - Wear long sleeves, long pants, and heavy-duty gloves when handling brush to minimize skin exposure.
  - Wash any exposed skin immediately with soap and water if contact with the plant is suspected.
  - Avoid touching your face, especially eyes and mouth, while working near brush.
  - Wash all tools, clothing, and gloves after exposure to remove plant oils.

#### *6. Communication*

- Hazards: Poor communication can lead to confusion and accidents when working near chainsaw crews.
- Mitigation:
  - Use clear hand signals and maintain eye contact with the chainsaw operator when approaching them.
  - Establish communication protocols, including stop signals for emergencies, before starting.
  - Volunteers should ensure they have the chainsaw operator's attention before moving in.

#### **Risk Mitigation Steps:**

- Pre-Task Briefing: Review safety protocols and communication signals with the team. Ensure all volunteers know their positions and tasks.
- Continuous Situational Awareness: Constantly assess the environment, particularly for unstable trees, hidden obstacles, and equipment malfunctions.

**Teamwork and Coordination:** Work in pairs to ensure mutual safety and accountability. Never work alone around chainsaws or fallen trees.

**Recommended Personal Protective Equipment (PPE):**

- Hearing protection (earplugs or earmuffs)
- Eye protection (safety glasses or goggles)
- Heavy-duty gloves (cut-resistant)
- Hard hat (to protect against falling debris)
- Steel-toed boots (to prevent foot injuries from falling objects)
- High-visibility vest (to improve visibility in the work zone)
- Long sleeves and pants (to protect against poison ivy, oak, and sumac)

Remember: Your safety is the top priority. Stay alert, maintain communication with chainsaw operators, and never attempt to handle tasks beyond your training. If you are unsure of a situation, stop and ask for help.