

PROTECT YOUR OUTDOOR POWER EQUIPMENT WITH PROPER FUELING & SAFETY

Editor's note: This article was written by Suzanne E. Henry, President, Four Leaf Public Relations LLC, which works with the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute.



Sports turf managers, coaches and athletic support organizations use outdoor power equipment regularly. You might use lawn mowers on your fields, a string trimmer to keep vegetation in check, a chain saw to clear downed trees, a generator to power on-site electrical needs by the field, or a utility type vehicle (UTV) to haul debris and trash.

But did you know that the gas you put in your car or truck may no longer be safe for use in your outdoor power equipment or small engines?

If you said no, you are not alone. Nearly two-thirds (64%) of Americans say they assume that any gas sold at the gas station is safe for all of their cars, as well as boats, mowers, chain saws, snowmobiles, generators and other engine products, according to a survey by Harris Interactive with the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI) in 2013.

As higher ethanol blended fuels become more common in the marketplace, it is increasingly important for consumers to know what types of fuel can be used in outdoor power equipment. New fuel blends containing greater than ten percent ethanol—such as E15, E30 and E85—are becoming available at gas stations throughout the country and may be lower in price than other blends. Fuel containing greater than 10 percent ethanol can be harmful and cause damage to small engines. In fact, it's illegal to use more than 10 percent ethanol gasoline blends in outdoor power equipment.

To help educate consumers on proper fueling, OPEI, an international trade association representing 100 small engine, utility vehicle and outdoor power equipment manufacturers and suppliers, created the “Look Before You Pump” campaign to mitigate the risk of consumers inadvertently misfueling equipment investments.

Known by its emblematic prominent, red warning hand symbol indicating “OK” for 10 percent ethanol and “No” for mid-level ethanol blends (such as E15, E30, E85), the campaign is spreading nationwide and now appears in major retailer outlets and among independent equipment dealers.

Fueling your outdoor power equipment properly and maintaining it well can ensure your equipment is reliable and lasts longer. It's also important to use outdoor power equipment safely, so you and the people around you are not hurt. Here are some tips to help.

Drain gasoline from the tank and replace it before starting equipment that has been sitting for a while. Gasoline that is untreated and left sitting in a fuel tank for more than 30 days can deteriorate and destabilize. This can cause problems when you want to start or run your equipment. Before starting any equipment that has been sitting for a while, be sure to drain the old fuel from the tank. You may want to use a fuel stabilizer.

Turn off the fuel valve. After you are finished with using your equipment, switch the fuel valve off until it's time to use the equipment again.

Avoid using greater-than-10 percent ethanol gasoline blends in any outdoor power equipment or small engine. Never use greater-than-10 percent ethanol gasoline blends, which are now commonly available at gas stations throughout the country and may be lower in price than other blends. It is illegal to use

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higher-ethanol gasoline blends in outdoor power equipment or small engines. What's more, such fuels can be harmful and cause damage to small engines.

Exercise caution when fueling. Fill your gasoline tank only when the engine is cold. If you need to refuel before completing a job, turn off the machine and allow the engine to cool. Don't spill when you fill. Never light a match or smoke around gasoline.

Be careful when starting your engine. Move your chain saw or other outdoor power equipment at least 10 feet (3m) from the fueling point before starting the engine.

Store fuel properly. Store gasoline in a clean, sealed plastic container that's specifically intended and designed for fuel storage, and store it away from direct sunlight.

Use the right type of fuel for your equipment. When it's time to refuel your equipment, be aware of the type of gasoline it needs and look before you pump.

Read your outdoor power equipment operating manual. Make sure you know how to properly use and maintain your outdoor power equipment. If you have lost your manual, search online for a replacement (remember to check the model number) or request one from the manufacturer.

MAINTAINING YOUR EQUIPMENT

Read and understand your owner's manual. Your manual contains the manufacturer's instructions for taking care of your small engine, including fueling instructions. If you have lost your manual, look online to find a replacement (remember to match the manufacturer and model number to your equipment) or request a new manual from the manufacturer.

Inspect your equipment for any problems. Make sure belts and hoses are not loose. Check for loose bolts and screws on machines that experience a lot of vibration during use. Accumulations of grass, leaves or excessive grease can cause a fire hazard. Check the line regularly on your trimmer and have replacement line or a new spool ready when you need it. Check the O-rings and hose connections on your pressure washer before its first seasonal use.

Sharpen those blades. Start each cutting season with a new or newly-sharpened chain saw blade. For a clean look and to promote healthy grass, sharpen the blades on push and riding mowers prior to mowing season.

Keep the spark alive and the oil flowing. Change your spark plug regularly as directed by the product manufacturer. See your owner's manual for a recommendation. Check oil level before each use in all small engines. This simple step can save you a lot of money and distress.

Ensure air flow is happening. Clean or replace air filters in outdoor power equipment prior to first use and throughout the season as needed.

Don't be afraid to seek out the professional advice or the service of a qualified servicing dealer. Take your riding mower or tractor to an experienced servicing dealer every year for a safety and maintenance inspection. If your equipment is experiencing problems, take it to a dealer.

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THINK SAFETY FIRST

Be careful when starting your equipment. When operating a lawn mower, inspect the mower for loose belts or hoses before you start it. Be sure no one else is nearby as you prepare to start the mower. If you use a riding mower, start it while sitting in the driver's seat, never while standing beside the mower.

Know safety procedures for every piece of equipment you use. Know how to stop the machine quickly. Do not remove or disable guards or other safety devices. Always slow down when operating any mower on a slope or difficult curve.

Commonsense is key when using a chain saw. Never carry a running chain saw when it is not being used, and be sure your work area is clear of debris that could trip you. If you are cutting down a tree, plan a retreat route for when the tree falls. Be aware of "kickback," which can happen when the nose or tip of the guide bar touches an object, or when the wood you're cutting pinches the saw chain in the cut.

Give portable electric generators lots of ventilation. Generators should not be used in an enclosed area, even if the windows or doors are open. The muffler on a generator can get extremely hot, so any combustible materials (leaves, grass, brush, etc.) should be cleared away before operating. Generators produce carbon monoxide, an odorless, colorless and poisonous gas.

Think safety when using your edger or trimmer. Wear protec-

tive gear. Ensure that your work area is clear of any stones or debris that could fly up. Never put your hands or feet near the cutting area. Stop the motor when moving from location to location with your trimmer.

Drive UTVs and lawn mowers with care. Always mow up and down slopes, never across. Avoid sudden starts, stops or turns. When a vehicle is loaded, the center of gravity is higher, and so is the risk of overturning. To keep the vehicle stable and avoid overturning, drive slowly and do not turn the vehicle in mid-slope or while on a hill.

Be aware of others in your work area. Pay attention to other people who might venture into your work area. Turn off your power equipment if it is not safe. If needed, block off the area with temporary signage or rope.

Dress for the job. Wear the proper attire for the work you are doing, including substantial shoes (no sandals or flip-flops), long pants and snug-fitting clothes. Protective glasses, chaps, eye or hearing protection, reflective clothing, head gear or gloves may be needed when operating certain types of outdoor power equipment.

Taking precautions to ensure your outdoor power equipment is fueled, maintained properly, and used safely, will help to keep you safe and your equipment in good shape throughout all seasons. For more safety tips for outdoor power equipment visit <http://www.opei.org/education/safety/tips/> ■



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