

Clearing Road Rights of Way Mechanically

One of the county road department's most dangerous work projects is cleaning off and cutting the rights of ways along dirt roads and highways. The process of cutting the rights of ways requires the use of heavy equipment such as tractors and bush hogs or a side cutter mounted on a tractor or motor grader. This equipment uses high speed rotating metal blades to cut the bushes, brush and small trees.

These mechanical operations create some major risks for the county and pose tremendous hazards for people, animals and property near the work zone.

First of all, it is important to identify the hazards that are created in this mechanical operation. Then it is possible to present solutions for the hazards that are identified.

Hazards created by the clearing of road rights of ways:

- the heavy equipment uses high speed rotating metal blades to slice through the brush, bushes, limbs and small trees
- the rotating blades sling the debris out from under the machine at a high rate of speed and with a tremendous force
- this debris becomes an unguided missile that can inflict major property damage on buildings and equipment as well as fatal strikes to a person standing nearby
- even all the protective metal guards around the frame of the cutter can not prevent all the debris from being hurled out from under the cutter in random directions
- the high speed rotating blades will also pick up bricks, rocks, pipe, etc. and catapult them with a tremendous force into buildings, equipment, vehicles and people with the same deadly force as a large caliber hand gun.

Safety measures to minimize accidents while cutting rights of ways:

- ✓ be sure that all of the proper guards are in place and on the cutter before cutting starts
- ✓ always cut the brush, bushes, limbs and small trees with the discharge chute pointing away from the road, from buildings, etc.
- ✓ always check the condition of the metal blades and the tightness of the bolts and nuts that secure the blades to the machine before the work starts each day
- ✓ always replace twisted, broken or warped blades with new blades as soon as possible
- ✓ always post signs on the roads to warn the public of the work and the hazards
- ✓ never operate the cutter when people are standing in or near the work zone
- ✓ using an experienced operator for this equipment is a very important
- ✓ operators should always wear their seat belt when operating the equipment
- ✓ those operators not in a fully enclosed cab should wear personal protective equipment
- ✓ any injuries to people or property should be reported immediately to the county