

# JIFNEWS

A Quarterly Newsletter from the Somerset County Joint Insurance Fund featuring Safety, Health & Wellness

## LEAF BLOWER SAFETY

Leaf blowers are useful tools when operated with care. However, just like any other piece of equipment, leaf blowers can be dangerous if you use them incorrectly. Following a few simple rules can help you use your leaf blower safely.

**NOISE** | Leaf blowers produce significant amounts of noise and can permanently damage your eardrums. Always wear hearing protection, such as earplugs or noise-reducing earphones, while using these machines. Check leaf blower-use regulations in your community or neighborhood. Some towns and neighborhood associations restrict leaf blower use to specific times of day, to reduce the risk of disturbing sleeping neighbors. You may not be allowed to use your leaf blower at all on some holidays, such as Thanksgiving, Christmas or Memorial Day.

**PARTICULATE MATTER** | These small machines produce a significant amount of force, and can stir up dust, dirt and other particulate matter. These materials can damage your eyes and lungs or cause respiratory irritation. "Consumer Reports" recommends wearing a dust mask and safety goggles at all times while the leaf blower is on. Particulates may also clog the air intake over time. Check to make sure your leaf blower's air intake is clear while the blower is off and disconnected from any power source. Clean the blower after every use to reduce problems with particulates.

**MOVING PARTS** | A leaf blower's moving parts, such as the fan, pose a hazard to fingers, toes and other body parts. Never put your face, feet or hands close to a leaf blower while it's turned on. Keep children and pets far away from the area while using a leaf blower, and be aware of pedestrian traffic on sidewalks or other nearby areas.

**ELECTRICITY** | Electric leaf blowers are smaller, lighter and often more convenient for cleaning small lawns than a gasoline-powered blower. However, they require special caution on wet areas. Ohio State University recommends against using an electric leaf blower in wet conditions. Wait until the area has dried, or use a gasoline-fueled model to reduce the risk of shock.

**FORCE** | According to North Dakota State University, leaf blowers can produce gusts of air moving at speeds up to 200 miles per hour. This level of force could cause you to trip and fall when working on steps, in slippery areas or in other unsafe conditions. Always use leaf blowers on flat, dry areas whenever possible. Move toward your work, rather than backing away from it. If you must use a leaf blower on steps or slope, use extra caution and check your footing before you begin work.



## Breakfast linked to "healthy heart"

PEOPLE SHOULD EAT BREAKFAST TO KEEP THEIR HEARTS IN GOOD CONDITION, ACCORDING TO RESEARCHERS IN THE UNITED STATES

Their study of 27,000 men, in the journal *Circulation*, showed those skipping breakfast were at a greater risk of heart problems.

The team at the Harvard School of Public Health said missing the meal put an "extra strain" on the body.

The British Heart Foundation said breakfast helped people resist sugary snacks before lunch.

The men, aged 45-82, were studied for 16 years. During that time there were more than 1,500 heart attacks or cases of fatal heart failure.

However, people who skipped breakfast were 27% more likely to have heart problems than those who started the day with a meal. The researchers adjusted for other lifestyle risk factors such as smoking and exercise.

Researcher, Dr Leah Cahill told the BBC: "The take-home message is eat in the morning when you wake up, preferably within an hour."

"The results show that something is better than nothing, but it's always better to have something healthy and balanced."

She said the timing of the meal seemed to be key and waiting until lunch rather than "breaking fast" may be straining the body over time.

She said this could be increasing the risk of high blood pressure, obesity and diabetes which could in turn damage the heart.

"Don't skip breakfast," Dr Cahill concluded.

Victoria Taylor, a dietitian with the British Heart Foundation, said: "These researchers only looked at men aged over 45, so we would need to see further research to confirm that breakfast has the same impact on the heart health of other groups of people."

"What we do know is that a healthy and filling breakfast can make that mid-morning biscuit less tempting, as well as giving you another opportunity to widen the variety of foods in your diet."

"Wholegrain toast, or cereals like porridge with low fat milk are a good way to start the day. Try a sliced banana or dried fruit on top and you'll be on your way to five-a-day before you've even left the house."

# Fall Safety Tips

As the air turns cooler and leaves drop from the trees, it's important to keep a few important fall safety tips in mind. With proper precautions and safety awareness, your family can enjoy that crisp autumn whether while avoiding some of the dangers that come with the season.

**SERVICE YOUR FURNACE** | Before the cold autumn and winter weather sets in, be sure to call your heating and cooling company to service your furnace. A specialist should inspect the furnace to make sure everything is in working order and that there are no leaks.

**USE FIREPLACES SAFELY** | Keep that fire in its proper place by using a fireplace screen to keep sparks from flying out of the fireplace. Never leave a burning fire unattended, and make sure a fire is completely out before going to bed.

**USE CAUTION WITH SPACE HEATERS** A space heater can be an effective way to warm up a chilly room, but it's essential that you read the instructions on the unit before you use it. If your space heater requires venting, make sure you have vented it to the outdoors. Never use your stove or oven to heat your home; only use space heaters that are approved for this purpose. Always allow at least three feet of empty area around space heaters.

**RECONSIDER LEAF BURNING** | The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reports that burning leaves produces dangerous and cancer-causing chemicals and urges homeowners to avoid disposing of leaves this way. If you decide to burn leaves, wear a protective mask. Burning leaves should only be attempted far away from a house or other structures on a homeowner's property. Always check the weather forecast before starting to burn leaves. This activity should not be attempted in windy conditions.

**EXERCISE CANDLE CAUTION** | Candles are a great way to give a room that warm glow, but they can also cause fires. According to the National Candle Association,

almost 10,000 home fires start with improper candle use. Never leave candles burning if you go out or go to sleep, and keep your candles away from pets and kids.

**CHANGE SMOKE ALARM BATTERIES** Change the batteries in your smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors when you turn back your clocks for Daylight Saving Time. Make sure to check the alarms with the new batteries installed. Check and replace any home fire extinguishers that have expired.

**LOOK UP BEFORE PRUNING TREES** If you have decided that your yard needs to be spruced up by trimming your trees, be sure to look up and survey the area carefully before you start. Make careful note of where power lines are located before you set up your ladder so that it is positioned away from them.

**USE CAUTION ON LADDERS** | Wearing appropriate footwear is important when using a ladder; shoes or boots may be wet, causing you to slip as you climb the ladder. The ladder should be positioned on a flat surface before use. Be sure that the tools you are using are specifically designed for this purpose and are in good condition before starting work.

**CLEAN UP FALLEN LEAVES** | Keep your driveway and walkway clear of falling leaves. Wet leaves can create a hazard for pedestrians in the fall by making sidewalks slippery. Later in the season, snow may mix with leaves to increase the risk of falling. Homeowners should mulch or rake up fallen leaves and dispose of them according to local by-laws.

FROM LOVETOKNOW.COM

## WATCH OUT FOR DEER ON THE ROADS



Whether you drive for a living or merely commute to and from work, you need to be aware of deer. Deer are most active at dusk and dawn, but can venture onto roadways any time of the day. Additionally, more than half of all deer-motor vehicle collisions occur in October and November, according to the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The department offers these driving tips to help prevent collisions:

- If you see one deer crossing the road, watch out for more. Deer often travel in groups and move fast to stay caught up with each other.
- If you see brake lights ahead of you, it could be because the driver has spotted a deer. Stay watchful as you drive through the area, as more deer could try to cross.
- Take note of deer-crossing signs and drive accordingly.
- Drive more slowly at night, giving yourself time to see the deer with your headlights. Lowering the brightness of your lights will make it easier to see deer.
- Be especially watchful when traveling near steep roadside banks. Deer can appear on the roadway with little or no warning.
- Be aware that headlights confuse deer and may cause them to move erratically or stop.
- If you accidentally hit and kill a deer, report the location of the deer's body to the city, county or state highway department that has jurisdiction over the road.

FROM SAFETY & HEALTH MAGAZINE, SEPT. 23, 2013