



## Snow Thrower Operation and Safety

Winter is just around the corner and with it the prospect of snow blanketing the countryside.

Mention winter in New England and it may conjure up an image of a little cabin in the middle of an undisturbed landscape of deep snow. There is an orange glow in the window from the fireplace and smoke curling out of the chimney. It makes a great Christmas card or Currier and Ives print, but, the reality is that when snow blankets the landscape around your house or mine, chances are pretty good that we have to move it out of the way so we can get to school, work and the grocery store.

Enter the snow blower. It's so much more efficient and handy than the snow shovel. But, as with all power equipment, there are a few safety rules to remember to keep your winter trouble and injury free.

1. Read the Owner's Manual and fully understand how to operate your snow blower. It may not be as exciting as the latest John Grisham novel, but there is a wealth of information in there that will help you get the most out of your machine and do it safely.
2. Do not disable or bypass any of the machine's safety features. I know it is tempting, but they are there for a reason. If a safety mechanism breaks, get it repaired promptly by qualified repair personnel.
3. Keep your snow blower in good operating condition. Perform the recommended maintenance that is called for in the owner's manual at the suggested intervals. If you do your own maintenance, it is a good idea to have the machine serviced by an authorized dealer every second or third year so they can give it a more thorough examination and address any small issues before they have a chance to become big issues. If you are not inclined to perform the light annual maintenance yourself, arrange to have annual pre-season maintenance done by your local power equipment dealer.
4. Never allow children to operate or play on or around the unit. Remove the key when in not in use. Never leave the machine running unattended.
5. Wear appropriate hearing protection. (As a side benefit, the ear muff style hearing protection that I wear also keeps my ears warm.)
6. Wear reflective clothing. Be particularly careful when operating near the street. Visibility is often limited in the winter; especially when it is snowing or you are blowing snow before sunrise or after sunset. If your snow blower is equipped with a headlight, make sure it works and use it. It can help you to be seen as much as to see.
7. Check the oil and fuel in the engine before you start. If you must refuel part way through the job, allow the engine to cool before adding gasoline. Fuel and fuel vapors are highly flammable and the engine, especially the muffler area, gets extremely hot.

8. If the discharge chute becomes clogged, always shut the engine off before attempting to clear the blockage. Many snow blowers have an onboard tool specifically for this purpose. Use it. If your snow blower doesn't have one, you can purchase an inexpensive tool to attach to your machine, or use a broom handle.
9. Be aware of where you are throwing the snow. Never direct the snow toward people, buildings, cars, etc. Stones, ice and even snow can cause damage to property and injury to people.
10. When you are finished, run the unit for a few moments to clear snow out of the auger/impeller area. Shut the engine off and use the cleanout tool or broom handle to clear away any excess clinging snow. This is to prevent the auger/impeller from freezing up if the melting snow freezes.
11. Finally, when you are finished with the snow blower, turn off the fuel shutoff valve. If, for any reason the carburetor leaks, this will prevent the contents of the fuel tank from ending up all over your garage floor. If your snow blower doesn't have a fuel shutoff, your local service dealer can install one very inexpensively.
12. While it is not safety related, here is a bonus tip.

Virtually all gasoline in the United States today has ethanol added to it. As a servicing dealer we are seeing more and more fuel related problems in equipment because of this. Here's why:

Ethanol attracts water and when enough water has been absorbed into the fuel, it can separate out and form drops of water in the fuel system. The result – your engine won't run.

Ethanol and water in combination are highly corrosive to the metal parts in your engine. Corrosion in your carburetor can impede the flow of fuel causing your engine to run poorly or not at all.

Ethanol attacks the rubber and plastic seals, fuel lines and other parts of your engine and causes them to swell, deform and lose resiliency. This often results in fuel leaks and poor running engines.

Ethanol adds oxygen to fuel which causes it to decay faster. This stale fuel makes the engine harder to start and to run poorly. Left long enough, the decaying fuel will leave a gummy residue in the carburetor that will necessitate cleaning or replacement.

To keep your snow blower running smoothly and to help prevent fuel related problems, it is a good idea to use a fuel stabilizer that is specifically formulated to counteract the effects of ethanol in fuel. There are several available on the market. If you buy a fuel stabilizer, check the label to make sure that it is designed to deal with ethanol.