

SKID STEER SAFETY... OPERATING AND SPOTTING FOR A SKID STEER

COURSE OUTLINE

- **When you are using a skid steer, you can't just "jump in".**
 - There are steps you need to take before you start the motor that will help you keep your jobsite a safer place.
- **First, you need to be mentally as well as physically ready to operate such a heavy piece of equipment.**
 - This means making sure you get enough sleep, food, and water beforehand.
 - If you're fatigued or dehydrated, the likelihood that you'll make a mistake while operating any equipment increases significantly.
- **The same thing can happen if you're not mentally "balanced".**
 - If you're feeling angry, sad, or just distracted, you should take time to "cool down and focus" before you operate a skid steer.
- **Once you are ready to go, you should read and understand everything in the skid steer's operator's manual.**
 - It should be in the machine at all times.
- **You can then begin your "pre-shift inspection," to confirm that all of the skid steer's parts are working correctly.**
- **First, you should check out anything that you can look at when the motor is turned off. This includes...**
 - Fluid and oil levels.
 - Potential leaks in the hydraulic cylinders.
 - Loose, worn or damaged parts in the cab, or with the bucket or tires.
 - Damaged labels.
- **Remember to wear protective equipment.**
 - Gloves are especially important when you're checking for hydraulic leaks.
- **Never use your hands to look for leaks within hydraulic cylinders.**
 - Instead, use the "cardboard test", running a piece of cardboard along the cylinder to see if it comes back wet or dry.

- **Then, with the motor on, verify that your controls are working correctly.**
 - Exercise them one at a time and make sure you can lift, tilt and turn the bucket smoothly.
- **Next check that your lights and signals all turn on and can be seen clearly.**
 - You may need another worker to help you with this.
 - If your skid steer has a “back-up” alarm, make sure that it works and can be heard above the noise of your construction site.
- **Last, check your parking brake by putting your skid steer in “park” and trying to move forward or backward.**
- **If any part of the skid steer fails your inspection, do not use it.**
 - Notify your supervisor immediately and tag it “OUT OF SERVICE”.
- **If your skid steer passes inspection, you can move on to surveying the site you’ll be working on. Look around the general area and note any...**
 - Debris.
 - Potholes.
 - Structures.
 - Overhead obstructions.
 - Marked underground utilities.
 - Vehicles, pedestrians, or other workers in the area.
- **Once you’re familiar with your jobsite and feel that you and the skid steer are ready to go, you can get to work.**
- **Skid steers are some of the most versatile and maneuverable machines on a construction site.**
 - But if you don’t know how to use them safely, it can quickly turn your jobsite into a disaster zone.
 - So it’s important that you know what to do and what not to do when you’re operating a skid steer.
- **Because skid steers are so large, they can be difficult to mount.**
 - If you rush, you could slip and fall.
 - Falling from that height can cause serious injuries.

- **So take your time and maintain “three points of contact”.**
 - At least two hands and a foot or two
 - feet and a hand, on the machine at
 - all times.
- **Once you have a good grip, pull yourself up and slowly rotate your body into the cab.**
 - Never use controls as step stools or handles.
- **Adjust your seat so that you can comfortably reach the controls.**
 - If you’re not comfortable, it could very well lead to some type of ergonomic injury.
- **Don’t forget to fasten your seatbelt.**
 - In the event of a collision or tip-over, it could save your life.
- **If you are “traveling” on a construction site, keep the skid steer’s bucket low to the ground.**
 - This will allow you to clearly see where you’re going.
- **When it’s time to make a turn, use the skid steer’s advantages.**
 - Increase the speed on one side of the machine as you turn to the opposite side.
 - This will make the “slow side” into a “pivot point”, which allows the “fast side” to swing around, or “skid”, to complete the turn.
- **When you’re picking up material with a skid steer, there are three ways you can do it...**
 - “Arc penetration”.
 - “Step penetration”.
 - “Undercutting”.
- **“Arc penetration” is when you force the skid steer’s bucket into the pile, then roll back and raise the arms in a continuous “arc” until the bucket is full.**
- **“Step penetration” also starts with forcing the bucket into the pile, but you do this at ground level.**
 - Then you raise the bucket about a foot and force it further into the pile.
 - You continue taking these “steps” until the bucket is full.

- **“Undercutting” is when you dig into the bottom of the pile and lift it.**
 - You shouldn’t do this with piles that are taller than the skid steer’s arm’s height.
- **Once you have a load in the bucket, slowly back away from the pile and move on to your destination.**
 - To unload, carefully uncurl the bucket and back away.
 - Remember to always check your mirror and sound your horn before moving in reverse.
 - If your skid steer has a back-up alarm, make sure that it’s working.
- **While you are operating a skid steer, never let someone walk under it when the arms are raised.**
 - Never try to operate the skid steer’s controls from outside the cab.
 - You should only run it when you are inside and can fully control it.
- **Sometimes, you will need to change the attachment that you’re using with your skid steer to better suit what you want to do.**
 - As you make the switch, be sure that all of the locking devices are engaged.
 - If the attachment comes loose while you’re using it, it could roll back down the loader’s arms into the cab, or hit someone nearby.
- **When you’re ready to “call it a day”, it’s important to park and shut down your skid steer safely.**
 - First, find an open, level place.
 - You want to avoid parking anywhere that will block fire hydrants, exits or entrances, or emergency equipment routes.
- **Next, lower and uncurl your bucket.**
 - Put all of the controls in “neutral” then set the parking brake.
 - Wait a few minutes while the machine cools down.
- **Then turn the skid steer off and dismount.**
 - Keep both hands and a foot or both feet and a hand on the machine at all times.
 - Take your time, and be especially careful if the machine has gotten muddy or slippery.
- **Skid steers aren’t just potentially dangerous for the person operating them.**
 - They can hurt people on the ground, too... especially “spotters”.

- **When operators have limited visibility, they will sometimes use a “spotter”.**
 - It is the spotter’s responsibility to safely guide the operator where they need to go.
- **If you’re the “spotter”, before the operator mounts the skid steer you should have an agreed-upon “action plan”.**
- **Be sure to discuss...**
 - Where the skid steer’s blind spots are.
 - Any hazards in the area.
 - The planned movement and positioning of the skid steer.
 - The hand signals you’re going to use.
- **Common hand signals that spotters use include...**
 - “Stop”.
 - “Continue” (“Keep Moving”).
 - “Move Right”.
 - “Move Left”.
 - “Slow Down”.
- **To signal “Stop”, most spotters will hold up one or both hands with closed fists, or with an open palm held forward.**
 - So you need to discuss which version of the signal you’re going to use with the operator.
- **To signal the operator to “Keep Moving”, you should...**
 - Raise your arm with a bent elbow.
 - Then wave the top part of the arm in a motion away from the machine.
- **In instances where the skid steer won’t be moving in a straight line, you’ll have to know the “Move Right” and “Move Left” hand signals.**
 - The most common way to do this is to hold your arm out straight, with a finger pointing in the direction the operator should move.
 - Then use the other hand to signal that they should “Keep Moving”.
- **To help prepare the operator to stop smoothly, you will need a motion that tells them to “Slow Down”.**
 - Here, you hold one arm out and move your hand up and down while keeping your palm face down.

- **Everyone should know the universal “Emergency Stop” signal.**
 - Repeatedly pointing both hands toward your chest to form an “X”, then away from you, and back in again.
- **When you’re acting as a spotter, you need to wear high-visibility clothing.**
 - You should also stay out of the skid steer’s “blind spots”
 - Don’t position yourself directly behind or in front of it, either.
- **Keep a safe distance away and stay in the operator’s line of sight.**
 - Watch your step as you’re moving.
 - If you’re so focused on the skid steer that you forget to look where you’re walking, you could trip on a rut or some debris.
- **It’s also critical that you pay attention to what’s going on around you.**
 - Construction sites are busy places, and if you allow your mind to wander it could have serious consequences for you and the skid steer operator.

*** * * SUMMARY * * ***

- **When you’re preparing to use a skid steer, make sure you are both physically and mentally ready to operate heavy equipment.**
- **You should conduct a “pre-shift inspection” before using a skid steer to verify that it’s safe to operate.**
- **Be careful when you’re mounting or dismounting a skid steer. Use the “three-point contact” method and ease yourself in, and out.**
- **To turn a skid steer, increase the speed on one side of the machine as you turn to the opposite side.**
- **“Undercutting”, “step penetration”, and “arc-penetration” are three ways you can load a skid steer.**
- **When you are shutting a skid steer down, find an open, level area to park and lower the bucket. Set all controls to neutral, then turn it off.**
- **Now that you understand how to operate a skid steer as well as be a “spotter” for one, you can get the most out of it on your jobsite... while at the same time keeping you and your coworkers safe!**