

## Methods for Safe Chain-Saw Transportation

As A.T. maintainers head out to clear the Trail of the usual lot of trees downed by winter storms, many will employ a chain saw to do the bulk of the clearing. And, as most maintainers know all too well, that involves not only cutting the often-snarled mess of trees, but also getting the chain saw and its associated equipment to each worksite. While a considerable expense in both money and time is made to teach safe and efficient use of chain saws, only a small portion of time is spent in training for transporting them safely. This article offers some guidelines, suggestions, and examples.

The U.S. Forest Service's *Chain Saw and Crosscut Saw Training Course—Student Guidebook (2006)* provides these guidelines:

### **Saw Transportation**

Saws must be transported in a way that protects them from being damaged, from injuring people, and from damaging property and equipment.

### **Transporting Chain Saws in a Vehicle**

- Keep the bar and chain covered with a chain guard.
- Properly secure the chain saw to prevent it from being damaged and to prevent fuel from spilling.
- Never transport a chain saw or fuel in a vehicle's passenger compartment.

**Transporting Chain Saws by Hand** – The muffler and power head can reach extremely high temperatures. Avoid these areas when carrying a saw that has been used recently.

- When carrying the saw for short distances, set the saw at idle speed and set the chain brake.
- When carrying the saw farther than from tree to tree, or in hazardous conditions (such as slippery surfaces or heavy underbrush), and in all cases if the saw is carried more than 50 feet, the saw shall be shut off and carried in a way that prevents the chain, muffler, and bumper spikes (dogs) from contacting your body.
- When carrying the saw on your shoulder, take extra care because of the sharpness of the chain and bumper spikes (dogs). A long-sleeved shirt, gloves, and a shoulder pad must be worn. The bar, chain, and bumper spikes (dogs) should be covered, preferably with a manufactured bar and chain cover. Chain saw chaps can be used to cover the bumper spikes (dogs).

There are a number of ways to satisfy those basic guidelines, many of which come down to ease of use, cost, and simply personal preference.

### **Transporting chain saws in a vehicle safely**

This is easiest to do with a pickup truck, as chain saws and their associated equipment can be secured outside of the passenger compartment. If they need to be transported using a passenger car, there are a number of products available that allow for safe transportation outside of the vehicle, including roof-mounted storage racks, such as those manufactured by Thule, Yakima, and Sears. Hitch-mounted “baskets” are available from a wide variety of stores at various prices. Many outdoor folks already own one of these to transport their outdoor sports gear. One caution: be sure to keep sawyer gear contained within these carriers—expensive gear can be ruined or, in the case of climbing equipment, rendered unsafe for use, from being saturated by spilled saw gas or bar oil.

### **Transporting chain saws in the field**

Several alternatives are available for safe and efficient transportation of chain saws once in the field.

Chain saws come with flimsy plastic covers when they’re purchased. Personally, I find that the best place for these is the trash can, as they are inadequate for covering the entire chain/bar and do nothing to cover the dogs or muffler, while doing everything to get in the way and frustrate. However, I have seen various ways that maintainers have modified these covers to fill their needs. Other homemade options include using old fire hose and custom leather sheaths, making sure to cover both the bar and dogs.

In addition to homemade options, a number of alternatives are available for purchase from various retailers such as Ben Meadows ([www.benmeadows.com](http://www.benmeadows.com)), The Fire Cache ([www.firecache.com](http://www.firecache.com)), and your local saw shop. One option, True North’s bar cover, is made of 1000-denier nylon, has exterior pockets for tools and spare parts, a leather guard to cover the dogs, and a foam pad for carrying over the shoulder. These handy covers are great for folks who prefer to carry over the shoulder, and they keep tools such as a srench and extra chain handy for quick access. One drawback is that the chain tends to hang up on the nylon when putting on or taking off the cover, but overall this is still a good option. Look to spend around \$50 for one of these covers, which should last a long time and be well worth the initial cost.



*True North Bar Cover Closed*



*Bar Cover Open with Pocket*

Another option for over-the-shoulder carrying is to use a pair of saw chaps. As shown below, this method allows for covering the bar as well as the dogs and muffler for safe carrying. Wearing a long-sleeved shirt with the collar flipped up is recommended in case the chaps shift and the chain or dogs become exposed.

While this is a low-cost alternative to other covers, the sawyer should be cautious and take care not to rip the chaps with the saw (if they can cut wood, they can cut the chaps, even when not

moving!) or soil them with saw gas and bar oil. If the latter happens, follow the chap manufacturer's recommendations for cleaning.



*Step 1: Place saw onto folded chaps with gas cap down*



*Step 2: Wrap chaps around bar using outer leg straps to secure*



*Step 3: Clip leg straps together and tighten*



*Step 4: Secure upper chaps to power head*

Finally, for a long haul, maintainers and trail crews often employ frame packs to rig various devices for safely carrying chain saws. [See the Summer 2008 and Fall 2008 issues of *The Register* for examples.] This option, while not providing access as quickly as the shoulder-carry method distributes the weight more evenly and limits one's exposure to the chain saw bar and dogs. Further, frame packs provide places to carry extra fuel, bar oil, tools and the like.

Whatever options you choose to transport your equipment on the road and Trail, due diligence in reducing unnecessary exposure to sharp or hot portions of the saw keeps us all safe.

Do you have a good method or invention for staying safe while carrying your saw? If so, share it with us and we'll post it in *The Register*!

Kerry Wood  
ATC Regional Trail Resources Manager  
Central and Southwestern Virginia Regional Office  
Appalachian Trail Maintainer—Outdoor Club of Virginia Tech  
[kwood@appalachiantrail.org](mailto:kwood@appalachiantrail.org)