

Tool safety and maintenance

Track maintenance work involves a variety of tools. Depending on the task, you might use a hammer, broom, rake, secateurs, loppers, saw, hedger, brush cutter, rake hoe, mattock, shovel... The list goes on!

Safe and efficient work practices are a high priority.

- Use the right tool for the job
- Use appropriate PPE
- Use well maintained tools
- Use tools mindfully

Following these principles will minimise the risk of injury and maximise your satisfaction in your work.

Choose the right tool for the job

The correct tool does the job as efficiently as possible and reduces the level of effort required. For example:



For pruning, you may need a variety of tools to handle the varying diameter of branches you will find on your section. Twisting and straining to make a cut is an indication that the tool is too small for the job.

Refer to the factsheet ***Clearing and pruning*** for suggestions.



For water bar maintenance, soil and debris build-up can be cleared with a shovel. However, you may need the extra weight of a rake hoe or mattock in rocky or gravelly soil.

Refer to the factsheet ***Managing water on the tread*** for more information.



For maintenance of Track marking, you'll want a decent hammer, preferably with claws in case you need to pull nails from trees.

Refer to the factsheet ***Track marking*** for more on this topic.

Use appropriate protective clothing and equipment to avoid injury

Suitable clothing and footwear should always be worn for Track maintenance. Standard work wear comprises:

- Full cover clothing (long sleeves and pants).
- Robust enclosed footwear.
- Gaiters to protect the lower legs (at your discretion).
- Hat (ideally, wide brimmed with neck protection).
- Other protection from the elements – sunscreen, insect repellent.

Depending on the task, you should also use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE):

- Gloves to protect hands from cuts and scratches.
- Safety glasses to protect eyes from chips and saw dust; a face shield is preferred for brush cutting or chainsawing (approved volunteers only).
- Hearing protection to protect hearing from close and loud noise.

Maintain your tools to keep them in great working condition

Well-maintained tools are safer tools. Tools in poor condition can be dangerous and require greater exertion to work.

- Prior to leaving home, check your tools to confirm they are in good working order. Make sure cutting parts are sharp. Examine each tool for damage, loose screws, smooth operation... lubricate if necessary!
- Use tools according to the manufacturer's instructions.
- Before leaving your section, always check you have all your tools!
- Clean your tools to remove any soil or tree/plant sap. Remove the sap lightly with some steel wool or warm soapy water and then rub the blades with vegetable oil to prevent rust.
- When not in use, store tools in a protected place away from moisture. This prevents rust or damage.

These principles apply to all tools (manual and powered). Additional recommendations for the maintenance (and safe use) of power tools can be found in the factsheets ***Safe use of power tools on the Track*** and ***JSA Using battery-powered tools***.

Use and handle tools mindfully

Accidents occur through inattention and carelessness.

Mindful work practices will improve safety and effectiveness.

- Always be aware of others working around you.
- Work in pairs and rotate roles BEFORE you get tired.
- Maintain a safety zone – identify the activity zone (e.g. swing zone of rake, mattock, electric hedger) and ensure others stay clear.
- When making cuts, consider where the tool and cut pieces might end up if it yields more suddenly or with less force than you expect.
- Pass a tool to another person carefully and intentionally; pass by the handle.

Tool safety extends to carrying them for transport.

- Retain your gloves to protect your hands
- Carrying tools with blades – the blades should point downwards.
- Carrying long-handled tools (e.g. rake hoe, electric hedger) – carry by your side, not over your shoulder.
- Carrying small tools in between use – use your daypack, not a pocket/clothing.