**TOOLS TALK – SAFETY AND TECHNIQUES**

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| **IMPORTANT**You should have completed a risk assessment before the workday/task, and should review and update it as necessary on the day of the task. It should be referred to during the task/tools talk when you tell volunteers about the site hazards and then kept safely, e.g. with the Emergency Contacts, during the task. Keep it for a short time after the task, or a photo of it, in case there are any problems or queries about our work afterwards.There is a blank risk assessment template on the LCG website (follow the Leaders link under the ‘How to join in’ tab), as well as templates for some of the main sites where we work. |

When introducing tools to groups:

1. Gather the participants together (ensure they can hear and understand your instructions)

2. Introduce each tool.

3. Demonstrate safe use.

You should include information on the purpose of the project; any particular site hazards; who the appointed leader and first aider/s are; precautions to take; where the first aid kit is and how the group and the day will be organised.

Remember: if volunteers are joining the project at various times of the day, make sure that those arriving later are given individual tuition, especially new volunteers.

**Tools**

**Carrying**

* Never carry more tools than you can comfortably manage.
* Always carry tools at your side, with the ‘dangerous’ end facing forward, points or blades facing towards the ground.
* Always keep a good distance between yourself and others when carrying tools.
* Never carry tools over your shoulder; human heads are easy to damage!
* When not in use, tools should generally be laid flat on the ground. Spades, shovels, forks and rakes should be placed with points downwards. This prevents the tools from flying up if the points are trodden on.

**Working**

* Always use tools correctly, as demonstrated.
* Be aware of people around you, and always work at a safe distance – with swinging tools, this is twice the length of the tool plus the user’s arm length.
* Never wear leather gloves when swinging any tools as they will slip through your hands. Use bare hands or gloves designed to offer increased grip. If you are using a single handle swinging tool, do protect the other hand with a glove, ie the hand holding the wood when working with a billhook.
* Never use a tool with a split or damaged handle, or with a loose head. If you think a tool might be damaged in any way, inform the leader and take it out of service.

**LOPPERS**

For cutting off small branches and twigs.

* Ratchet loppers will cut slightly thicker branches than non-ratchet ones. As a general guide, if you have to struggle to cut the branch or twig, and start to twist the loppers to finish the cut, then the piece of wood is too thick for loppers and you should stop using them and change to using a bowsaw.
* When not in use, put the loppers down on the ground; do not hang them in a tree.
* Safe carrying: carry so they don’t open by holding by the lower tool arm.

**BOWSAW**

For cutting lengths of wood, cutting down small trees, coppicing or removing tree branches.

* Clear area around where you are working, e.g. grass, twigs, so the saw does not snag. The serrated edge can cause cuts.
* Always wear gloves – on the saw hand to protect it from scrapes etc from whatever you are cutting, and on the other hand to protect it if the saw blade snags and jumps.
* Make a small nick in the wood first. Use the full length of the saw, draw it backwards, then get a rhythm of a forwards and backwards motion. Keep the saw and blade straight!
* If it doesn’t cut easily, try another saw to see if you have the same problem, as the blade may need to be straightened or replaced
* When not in use, put the tool down on ground; do not hang it in a tree.
* Safe carrying: hold tool as if carrying a bag by its handle, with the blade facing downwards.

**FORK AND SPADE**

* Don’t use your instep to push the tool into the ground; use the ball of your foot.
* Don’t stamp down on the tool to try to force it into the ground; you can hurt your foot and if you miss, you can scrape the side of your leg.
* Don’t overload the fork or spade; only lift what you can safely manage and lift using your legs, not your back.
* When not in use, either stick the tool upright in the ground or lay it in sight on the ground, prongs facing downward or the curve of the spade facing into the ground.

**RAKE**

* Don’t reach too far away to rake material as that can strain your back
* Don’t try to pull too much material each time; again, that can strain your back.
* When not in use, put it somewhere visible on the ground with the prongs facing down.

**PITCHFORK, ETC.**

* Don’t overload the pitchfork etc.; only lift what you can safely manage and lift using your legs, not your back.
* Watch for people around you if carrying a load over your shoulder
* If using it to load material onto the fire, don’t overload it and don’t risk getting too close to the fire or getting it caught in material in the fire.
* When not in use, put it somewhere visible on the ground with the prongs facing down.

**SCYTHES**

**Austrian**

* Only to be used by trained individuals who know safe working techniques
* When not in use lie safely on the ground, with blades protected so that no one can accidentally walk into the blade.

**Slashers**

* Maintain a safe working distance - twice the length of the tool plus the user’s arm length.
* Do not wear leather gloves with swinging tools as they do not have good grip and the tool can slip through your hands. Use bare hands or gloves designed to offer increased grip.
* Be aware that the slasher may catch in whatever material you are trying to cut and bounce back, so keep a firm grip.
* When not in use lie safely on the ground, with blades protected so that no one can accidentally walk into the blade.

**BILLHOOK**

For taking the side branches off lengths of wood (snedding), splitting wood or hacking at wood (like using an axe).

* No gloves on tool hand; well-fitting glove on non-tool hand.
* Maintain safe working distance.
* Never throw a billhook or use it to hack wood.
* Use with the blade moving away from the body, hook facing downwards, keeping the piece of wood you are working on between you and the billhook.
* Keep the billhook as parallel and close to the wood as possible.
* Place flat on the ground.
* Safe carrying: walk holding tool next to leg with hook facing backwards.
* Sharpen using a round sharpening stone after each session.

**WHEELBARROW**

* Don’t overload the wheelbarrow; only take what you can safely balance and push.