

Hand Tools – *Using A Shovel Safely*

Basic Shoveling Safety Tips:

- Warm up before shoveling with a few stretching exercises.
- Try not to smoke or eat a large meal before shoveling.
- Face the material you're about to shovel.
- Wearing leather gloves while shoveling it will improve your grip and help prevent blisters.
- Lift with your legs instead of your back and keep your back straight, your knees bent.
- Throw the material forward and avoid throwing material over your shoulder.
- Twisting while throwing behind you can cause back strain - turn with your feet, rather than your back.
- Push the shovel to move the material and avoid lifting whenever possible.
- Try a smaller shovel to keep the loads lighter.
- When using a larger shovel, avoid overloading it - skim from the top, then remove the bottom layer.
- Don't try to shovel too much too quickly. Allow enough time to do the work so you don't feel rushed.
- Follow a slow and steady pace. Take frequent breaks to stand up and stretch.
- Watch your step, slips and falls are all too common
- Drink water during breaks to prevent dehydration.

Selecting a shovel:

When selecting a shovel, consider it's weight, handle length, type and size and also the type of blade you'll need.

- Choose the lightest shovel that can be used to accomplish your task.
- Choose a shovel with a handle that is longer than those found on standard shovels. This will reduce the amount of bending needed when lifting the shovel from the ground. A 42" handle may be adequate for a shorter person. Taller people should look for a handle length of 52".
- **Look for shovels that have an angled handle.** Typically, a bend will occur in the handle approximately 2/3 of the way down from the handle. Using an angled handle will decrease the force imposed on the spine while shoveling. The angled handle also allows the user to stand more upright while working.
- **Blade size determines efficiency.** The more you can move with each shovel load, the more efficient your work is. However, efficiency has to be balanced with load. Aim to keep each shovel load at 20 pounds, more or less. More if you're physically fit and strong. Less for those of us who don't frequently work out and have less muscle strength. Choose a blade size that can carry this load, keeping in mind that load size will change depending on the density and consistency of the material being moved (e.g. grain versus wet soil).
- **What about a Two-handed or "levered" shovel?** A two-handed shovel reduces the need to bend and stoop while working, while increasing efficiency. The second handle, mounted to the handle near the blade of the shovel, allows the person to push the blade with one hand and lift the load vertically with the other.
- **Above all else,** take time to try out the shovel before you buy it. If you have two people of different heights and fitness shoveling, it may be necessary to have two different shovels, or one shovel with a handle that's length can be adjusted.



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”**