Finger injuries, including amputations, accounted for about half of the more than 3,300 estimated emergency-room visits related to snowblowers reported for 2012. Back and shoulder strain were also common. Here’s how to protect against these and other injuries when operating a snowblower this winter for Colby.

**Safe Operating Tips**

- Never wear loose pants, jackets, or scarves, which can get tangled in a snow blower’s moving parts and pull you in with them.
- Wear earplugs or other hearing protection, especially with a gas-powered model, which typically runs above the 85 decibels at which hearing damage can occur.
- Before the snow gets too deep, remove doormats, sleds, boards, wires, newspapers, and anything else from the area that you’ll clear to avoid clogs and damage to the machine.
- Protect yourself from carbon-monoxide poisoning by starting and running a gas-powered snow blower outside, never in a garage, shed, or other enclosed area even if the door is open.
- For an electric model, use an outdoor extension cord rated for your model, connected to an outlet with ground-fault-circuit-interrupting (GFCI) protection. Then be sure to keep the cord safely away from the spinning auger while working.
- Turn off the engine of a gas snow blower or unplug the cord of an electric model before clearing a clog at the auger or discharge chute. And use a clearing tool or a broom handle to clear the clog—never your hands or feet, even if you’re wearing gloves: a stationary auger and impeller are often under enough belt tension to harm hands and feet, even with the engine or electric motor off.
- Wait until a gas model’s engine is cool before refueling to avoid igniting the gasoline.
Additional Considerations:
Remember, heavy exertion and cold temperatures can be a dangerous combination. Take frequent breaks to avoid overexertion. Seniors and people with hypertension, heart disease, or diabetes should consult a doctor before using a snowblower. If your driveway is especially long and two or more cars wide, consider having it plowed.

**BY THE NUMBERS:**

19 snowblowing related fatalities since 1992

500 amputations a year due to trying to clear the chute

5,700 emergency room visits a year from snowblower accidents
Review / Discussion Questions:
1. What is the biggest hazard related to snowblower operation?
2. What is the correct way to unjam a clogged auger?
3. What are some other safety risks associated with snowblower operation?

Questions, concerns or comments contact the EHS Director at extension 5504.