

Toolbox Safety Topic

Outdoor Safety

I. INTRODUCE THE TOPIC

Now that the weather is warmer, you may find yourself working outdoors more often. Whether you're performing activities such as mowing, weed-eating, and trimming, or performing research, monitoring, and testing activities, you may find yourself face-to-face with poisonous plants, insects, spiders, and snakes. Contact, bites, or stings may send you to the doctor's office or emergency room for a remedy, but remember, an "ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure".

II. ASK A RELATED QUESTION

Mosquitoes can infect you with serious diseases such as Encephalitis, which is a viral infection of the brain that can kill you. Should you wear light-colored clothes to detract mosquitoes, or dark-colored clothing? Mosquitoes are attracted to dark clothing, so you should wear light-colored clothing when working in areas where mosquitoes are present.

III. POINT OUT DEPARTMENT SPECIFIC EXAMPLES

Discuss what can be done to correct the hazard(s) and assign responsibility at this time so that hazards can be corrected (or improved) before the next meeting.

IV. EXPLAIN POLICIES AND/OR PROCEDURES

Bees, Wasps, Yellow Jackets, and African Honey Bees: Stings kill more people each year than all other venomous animals combined. Yellow jackets can sting repeatedly. Honey bees have barbed stingers that remain in your skin. African honey bees can threaten your life. Even if you're not allergic or sensitive to bee stings, multiple stings can cause anaphylactic shock, a life-threatening allergic reaction.

- Look out for swarms; a hive could be nearby. Beehives and yellow jacket nests are found in hollow trees, culverts, and hanging from tree limbs.
- Keep food and drinks in your vehicle. Bees are attracted to sweet smells.
- Loud noises, engine vibration, and waving your arms can provoke an attack. If attacked, cover your face and run to the nearest shelter.
- Watch for unusual reactions to stings. Call 911 immediately.
- Remove bee stingers right away by scraping horizontally with a knife or credit card. Never squeeze the stinger, venom can be injected into the skin.
- Wash the area with soap and water to avoid infection. Ice packs, creams, sting swabs, or antihistamines can decrease pain and swelling.

Fire Ants: When fire ant colonies are disturbed, they swarm over the victim and inflict as many as 5,000 stings in a few seconds. Fire ant venom is toxic and can cause a life-threatening medical emergency. They can be found under buildings, in mounds, in fields and in ditches. They also nest in utility boxes, causing power outages and fires!

- Check electrical boxes regularly.
- Keep piles of dirt away from buildings.
- If nests are found, call an exterminator. Don't attempt to do it yourself.
- Minor symptoms include severe burning pain and blisters.
- Severe reactions to bites, such as difficulty breathing and/or swallowing, should be treated by a doctor immediately.

Ticks: Many diseases are transmitted from ticks. Lyme Disease and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever are the most common. Lyme Disease is caused by a bacteria carried by deer ticks and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever occurs across the country, but most often on the Atlantic seaboard and in the southeast and south-central states. Years after exposure, you can suffer from heart abnormalities and other symptoms. Untreated, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever can cause flu-like symptoms, mental confusion, gangrene, and even death!

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- Wear clothing that covers as much of your body as possible to prevent ticks from reaching your skin, for example, tuck your pant legs into your socks or boots. Check for ticks after each shift where you may have been exposed so they can be removed before they bite.
- Remove the tick by pulling the tick straight out or the head can break off. Clean the area immediately with soap and water or alcohol.
- See a doctor if you suspect a problem. Without early treatment, you can experience chronic fatigue, arthritis, and heart abnormalities.
- There are vaccines for Lyme Disease.

Spiders: Black widow spider venom is 15 times more poisonous than rattlesnake venom! The brown recluse spider bite can damage body tissues. Watch for signs of spiders when working under houses and in dark basements or attics.

- Wear heavy-duty gloves when moving piles of brush or wood.
- If you notice a tingling feeling, sudden nausea, or stomach pain, convulsions, or signs of shock, you may have been bitten by a spider. Seek medical attention immediately.

Caterpillars: Some varieties of caterpillars can be life-threatening. Hidden in their coat are short, hollow spines loaded with poison. When they touch you, the spines break and poison flows into your skin.

- Signs and symptoms of poisonous caterpillar contact include immediate burning pain, local numbness, swelling, nausea, vomiting, high fever, difficulty breathing and signs of shock. Get medical attention immediately.
- Use adhesive tape to pull the imbedded hairs from your skin. Wash the area with soap and water.
- Stay on the look out for caterpillars. Most poisonings result from accidental contact. If necessary, spray infested vegetation with EPA-approved insecticide.

Snakes: Rattlesnakes, copperheads, and cottonmouths are the most common poisonous snakes. The second most common is the coral snake. Identification can not only help you to avoid the dangerous ones, but assist medical personnel with proper treatment.

- Rattlesnakes, of course, have rattles on their tail and will often, but not always, warn you that they are nearby. Their heads are arrow-shaped and they have cat-like eyes.
- Copperheads have light and dark bands that wrap around their bodies. They also have arrow-shaped heads and cat-like eyes.
- Cottonmouths have hourglass markings. When they open their mouth, it's as white as cotton.
- Coral snakes have red, white or yellow, and black bands. "Red on yellow can kill a fellow."
- Leave snake alone. Most people are bitten trying to kill them or to get a better look. If a snake bite contains venom, swelling occurs within ten minutes. Fingers and toes become numb and you may notice a metallic taste in your mouth. You may also feel sleepy and have difficulty swallowing or speaking.
- Avoid running and do not panic. Use a belt or rope to minimize the flow of poison. Keep the area lower than your heart. Never attempt to remove venom with your mouth. Get medical attention immediately.
- Watch out for snakes under houses, piles of wood or stone, and in tall grass. Turn rocks and wood over with a stick before picking them up.

Rodents: If you open up cabins and sheds closed during the winter, or clean outbuildings for farm and construction equipment, work in crawl spaces under houses or in vacant buildings that might have a rodent infestation, you could be exposed to Hantaviruses. Hantaviruses can cause diseases which can kill you. When fresh rodent urine, droppings, saliva, or nesting material is kicked up or swept, you can breathe in the virus. Symptoms may include fever, deep muscle aches, and severe shortness of breath after working around rodents. See a doctor immediately. To prevent exposure in rodent infested areas, respirators and other personal protective equipment is necessary to protect personnel.

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Date: _____

Meeting Conducted By: _____ Title: _____

Attendees

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