

SAFETY SENSE

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Editor's note: PASS ON EACH ISSUE OF THIS NEWSLETTER TO EVERYONE WITH SAFETY RESPONSIBILITIES AT YOUR COMPANY.

Insect Bites and Stings Can Be Very Serious

KEY POINTS:

- Landscape, tree care, and professional lawn care workers are at high risk of painful and sometimes even fatal insect bites and stings.
- In most cases, insect bites and stings do not result in severe reactions or death.
- In some cases, however, workers allergic to bee or wasp stings will go into anaphylactic shock — which can result in loss of consciousness or death — after being stung by one of these insects. Death can also occur if a worker contracts the West Nile Virus from an infected mosquito. And bites from certain deer ticks or western black-legged ticks may result in Lyme disease, the most commonly reported tick-borne disease in the United States.
- In some parts of the country, including Maricopa County, Arizona, “big box” stores and other employers have been cited and fined for failing to maintain drainage areas to prevent the breeding of mosquitoes that may be infected with the deadly West Nile Virus.
- See the June 2005 *Safety Solutions* insert [“Reduce Your Risk of Insect Bites and Stings”](#) for training materials for your workers.

Checklist on Protection From Insect Bites and Stings

- ✓ Reduce or eliminate sources of stagnant or standing water wherever possible. Do this on a weekly basis because mosquitoes often breed in puddles that are more than four days old.
- ✓ Know that bees and other stinging insects typically congregate near flowering plants,

trash cans, junk piles, and outdoor eating areas. Put away soda cans and leftover food.

- ✓ Be aware that ticks are often found at outdoor work sites with woods, bushes, tall grass, or leaf litter. Ticks are very small eight-legged organisms that attach to a person's skin.

Take the following precautions when working outdoors:

- ✓ Cover as much of your skin as possible. Wear a long-sleeved shirt, long pants, socks, and a hat. Light-colored clothing is best. Avoid wearing bright-colored clothing.
- ✓ Tuck in your shirt and tuck the bottom of your pants into your socks.
- ✓ Do not use cologne, hair spray, perfume, or floral-scented shampoo, soap, or deodorant.
- ✓ Use an insect repellent that contains the ingredient “DEET” or “Picaridin.”
- ✓ If you know you are allergic to insect stings, carry an EpiPen® (an auto-injector that administers epinephrine) with you at all times when working outdoors.
- ✓ Immediately call 911 for professional emergency medical assistance if you or a coworker have a severe reaction to a tick bite or another insect bite or sting. Know that not all reactions will occur right away. For example, a red rash or patch at the site of a tick bite will slowly expand over a period of several days. A severe reaction to an insect bite or sting may include dizziness, breaking out in hives, vomiting, severe cramps, or trouble breathing.
- ✓ Use tweezers to immediately remove ticks that are embedded in your skin.

Reduce Your Risk of Skin Cancer

KEY POINTS:

- Employers and employees in our industry are at increased risk of developing skin cancer due to the number of hours spent working outdoors in the hot sun.
- Skin cancer is the most common and the most rapidly increasing form of cancer in the United States. Officials estimate that more than one million new cases of skin cancer will be diagnosed in the United States this year (2008).
- There are steps you can take to reduce the risk of this costly and sometimes fatal disease. One important step is to train your workers. See the July 2005 *Safety Solutions* insert "[Protect Yourself from Overexposure to the Sun](#)" for an English/Spanish tailgate training lesson on this topic.

Skin Cancer Prevention Dos and Don'ts

DO —

- Know the difference between the various types of skin cancer. Basal cell carcinoma and squamous cell carcinoma are the most common. Approximately 95 percent of the cases of these types of cancer are curable if they are detected and treated early. The more serious skin cancer, melanoma, is responsible for more than 75 percent of all skin cancer deaths.
- Rotate outdoor workers' schedules, when possible, to reduce the amount of time spent in the sun. The sun's rays are the strongest between the hours of 10 a.m. and 3 p.m.
- Wear sunscreen and protective clothing when working outdoors in the sun.

DON'T —

- Hesitate to send an employee to the doctor if he or she shows signs of possible skin cancer.
- Believe that melanoma is always fatal. It can be cured when it is caught early enough.
- Think that only fair-skinned people develop skin cancer. Persons with dark skin and dark hair are also susceptible to the disease. It is especially important to educate your Hispanic workers about this disease. Data from one California study found that Hispanic persons' skin cancer tumors are generally thicker when diagnosed than those of non-Hispanic persons, indicating a longer wait before diagnosis and a poorer prognosis for recovery.

Checklist on Reducing the Risk of Skin Cancer

- ✓ Use sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of 15 or greater when working outdoors.
- ✓ Protect as much of your skin as possible from the harmful effects of the sun's ultraviolet rays. Wear a long-sleeved shirt, long pants, socks, gloves, and a hat that shades the top of the head, face, ears, and back of the neck. Wearing sunglasses will help protect your eyes.
- ✓ See a doctor if you notice any of the following possible signs of skin cancer: Moles that have irregular borders, are not symmetrical, are larger than a pencil eraser, and are not uniform in color throughout. Moles that have become itchy, painful, or have changed in size. Red patches, lumps (including on the top of the head), or bleeding sores that don't heal.

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