Poison Oak Is No Joke

Each year, countless workers need medical treatment for reactions to poison oak. Some people are less prone than others, however no one is completely immune to the effects. You should learn to recognize poison oak and what measures to take to decrease the unpleasant and disabling side effects.

Poison oak can thrive in moist wooded areas or dry exposed hillsides. It can grow as a vine, trailing shrub or upright woody shrub. Typically, it looks like a small oak leaf with a triple leaf pattern leading off one stem with prominent veins and a shiny surface; however it can change its appearance in different seasons. Even without leaves, the bare wood and roots are still dangerous.

Keep away from vegetation that you suspect may be poison oak. Any object (tool, clothing, or animal) exposed to poison oak can expose others or re-expose you when touched again. When you enter an environment where poison oak may be present, remember to take the following precautions:

- Cover all exposed skin. Wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants tucked into boots, leather gloves with gauntlets, a hat, and a neck scarf.
- Following exposure, remove clothing and wash separately from other laundry; remove shoes first and leave them outside for decontamination by washing.
- When dressing the next time, put shoes on last so any remaining poison oak residue on shoes doesn’t contaminate the inside of trousers.
- For some people; barrier creams, injections or tablets have proven effective in preventing the toxic oil contained in all parts of the poison oak plant from causing irritation or reaction.
- If contact is made with the poison oak plant or something contaminated by it, wash the area immediately or take a shower, not a bath, using a strong soap or detergent.
- If an exposure to poison oak results in a reaction, consult a pharmacist for minor inflammation and itching and a physician for more severe reactions.

Keep in mind that no part of a poison oak plant should ever be consumed or burned. Ingestion or inhalation can cause violent reactions with sometimes-deadly results. Destroy poison oak using only approved vegetation sprays specifically designed for its eradication.

Pruning is an everyday agricultural activity. Workers who prune must be aware of the dangers they may face and be trained in safe pruning techniques such as safe tool handling, ladder safety, and proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE) for pruning.

Personal protective equipment may include gloves, eyewear, headwear, shoes, long sleeved shirts, pants, and earplugs for use around power tools. Based on the weather conditions, workers should dress for weather conditions when they are pruning.

When it’s warm, light-colored, thin clothing is suggested. For cold or wet days, warm layers work best. And whenever outdoors, sunscreen and a wide-brimmed hat to block ultraviolet rays is recommended. To protect against falling limbs and debris, hard hats and sturdy or steel toed shoes should be worn. And, in some cases, a dust mask may be necessary to perform cutting, grinding or sawing of limbs and foliage.

Pruning requires workers to get close to a plant to make a cut. To ensure eye protection the proper personal protective equipment (PPE) can prevent eye injury.
F R O M  O U R  E X P E R T

Keep Telecommuters Safe

As more businesses look for creative ways to control expenses in today’s tough economic climate, more are adopting flexible workplace alternatives. Telecommuting can be a win-win for both employers and employees, as it allows the reduction of costly office space, and for employees, it eliminates the morning commute and associated personal expenses. But, with all good things, there are collateral risks that need to be taken into account. Regardless of where employees work, the risk of developing musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs) still exists, and is the responsibility of the employer to help minimize.

Once the decision has been made to allow employees the flexibility to work from their homes, employers need to ensure that the same safe practices and environment that has become the norm at office locations is also being practiced at telecommuting locations.

Some important questions to ask:

Where is the employee working?
Is there a proper desk available? The best home workstation is one that is dedicated to be just that, a workstation. Coffee tables, kitchen counters and dining room tables are tempting, but not suitable for working.

What type of computer will be used? Is it a laptop, a desktop? While laptops are the computer of choice due to their versatility, a desktop is always the better choice. If that is not an option, laptop users should be provided a mouse, an external keyboard, and if possible an external monitor.

How about the chair? Does it adjust? A properly fitting office chair is essential for all computer workstations. It should be adjustable, and most important, that the employee is trained how to use it.

For telephone use, is a hands-free device available? Telephone use is a given when employees deal with clients, vendors, and employees at other locations. A hands-free device should be made available to help to minimize the risk of MSDs. This applies to both mobile and fixed telephones.

While these are fairly obvious risks and solutions, psychosocial and other physical risk factors are real. Working in isolated locations increases the risk of stress and fatigue due to sedentary environments, and reduced human interaction. Efforts should be made to bring in employees periodically for safety meetings, team building activities, and involvement in wellness programs that promote fitness. Remember, the goal of telecommuting is to reduce expenses.

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from a ricocheting branch, a sharp twig, or flying debris. So eye protection, such as safety glasses or face shields, is essential. Long-sleeved shirts, neck scarves, and long pants guard against other cuts and scrapes.

Pruning tools have sharp blades and pinching points. Pruners can protect themselves and others from injuries by handling tools correctly, maintaining and storing them properly, and wearing well-fitted protective gloves. Well-fitting gloves allow for a better tool grip and prevent blisters, cuts or puncture wounds.

Ladders are often used for pruning, so workers should be trained in proper climbing techniques, ladder placement, and ladder maintenance. Shoes with good tread provide better traction for safe climbing. It’s critical for pruners to note the location and height of electrical lines and avoid touching them with ladders, pruning and lift equipment or foliage.

Other pruning safety practices include lifting properly; avoiding awkward postures; drinking water to prevent heat exhaustion and dehydration; taking short, frequent breaks from repetitive tasks; and stretching before, during, and after work. Sometimes pruners encounter bees, wasps, snakes, and ticks, so workers should avoid or take care around areas where there are insects or reptiles. Lastly, maintaining good health and overall strength can reduce injuries from the physical labor of pruning. If workers prune with safety in mind, they can nip pruning hazards in the bud.
Call Before You Dig

Before you dig in California, call for an Underground Service Alert (USA) or you could accidentally hit power, cable, or pipelines with dangerous or explosive gases. Accidental contact with underground utilities can cause property damage, injury and even death. This notification is required for small holes in private yards or large excavations on construction sites.

Whether you use hand tools, power tools, or mobile equipment to dig, mark the site of your planned excavation in white and call the USA hotline or log into the website to submit a dig notice. Notify USA at least 2 to 14 days before you dig to allow service providers that have wires, lines, or pipes in the area a chance to mark them.

From anywhere in California notify the local one call center at 811. Their website is www.call811.com.

When you notify the USA service of your excavation by phone or email, your excavation will be assigned a ticket number good for 28 days. You need an active ticket number for the duration of your excavation. Keep the ticket number to validate your excavation permit.

When utility service providers mark their lines and pipes, they use color-coded markings for each type of installation. Keep these marks visible during your excavation. If the markings are not visible or become damaged, contact the local call center at 811 to have them re-marked.

When you are excavating, use hand tools to locate and expose the underground utilities. Dig gently; excessive force can damage pipes. Use tools with fiberglass handles to reduce the risk of shock. An air or vacuum excavation may be the safest way to expose underground utilities. If you damage underground utilities, notify USA and/or the owner immediately. ✗

Llame antes de excavar

Antes de excavar en California, llame para una Alerta de Servicio Subterráneo (USA, por sus siglas en inglés) porque de lo contrario podría golpear accidentalmente cables de energía, otros cables, o tuberías con gases peligrosos o explosivos. El contacto accidental con servicios públicos subterráneos puede causar daños a la propiedad, lesiones e incluso la muerte. Esta notificación se requiere tanto para huecos pequeños en patios privados como para excavaciones grandes en obras de construcción.

Lo mismo si usa herramientas manuales, herramientas eléctricas o equipos móviles para excavar, marque con color blanco el lugar de la excavación planeada y llame a la línea de asistencia de USA o visite su sitio web para enviar una notificación de excavación. Notifíque a USA al menos de 2 a 14 días antes de excavar para dar oportunidad a que los proveedores de servicios que tienen cables, líneas o tuberías en el área las marquen.


Cuando notifique su excavación por teléfono o por correo electrónico al servicio USA, a su excavación se le asignará un número de permiso válido por 28 días. Necesita un número de permiso activo por la duración de su excavación. Consérve el número de permiso para validar su permiso de excavación.

Cuando los proveedores de servicios públicos marcan sus líneas y tuberías, usan marcas con código de color para cada tipo de instalación. Mantenga estas marcas visibles durante su excavación. Si las marcas no están visibles o se dañan, comuníquese con el centro de llamadas local en el 811 para hacer que las vuelvan a marcar.

Cuando esté excavando, use herramientas manuales para localizar y dejar al descubierto las líneas de los servicios públicos subterráneos. Excave con cuidado; el uso de fuerza excesiva puede dañar las tuberías. Use herramientas con mangos de fibra de vidrio para reducir el riesgo de descarga eléctrica. Una excavación neumática o al vacío pudiera ser la forma más segura de dejar al descubierto servicios públicos subterráneos. Si causa daño a servicios públicos subterráneos, notifique inmediatamente a USA y/o al propietario. ✗
Return Of Whooping Cough

Pertussis is a respiratory illness commonly known as whooping cough. This very contagious disease is caused by a type of bacteria called *Bordetella pertussis*, and can be deadly to infants. The disease is found only in humans and is spread from person to person. People with pertussis spread the disease by coughing or sneezing while in close contact with others, who then breathe in the pertussis bacteria. The first two weeks of whooping cough are the most infectious period of contagion.

The disease usually starts with cold-like symptoms and perhaps a mild cough or fever. Pertussis is confirmed with a laboratory test from a nose swab taken at the health care provider’s office, and early treatment with antibiotics is very important.

**PREVENTION:** Vaccination is the prevention. Vaccine protection for pertussis fades with time, so adults need a booster shot. Contact your treating physician about a pertussis vaccination or booster.

Employer Education Series

State Fund continues to promote community educational outreach by increasing the quantity and frequency of employer seminars. These seminars are produced and sponsored by State Fund and are open to State Fund policyholders. The seminar topics cover all aspects of worker’s compensation and are offered statewide.

As part of State Fund’s Employer Education Series, the local State Fund Loss Control departments offer safety seminars dedicated to loss prevention. They feature safety training targeted to specific industries and safety topics of interest to California employers. Various programs in the series are developed in conjunction with State Fund insured Group Programs and external affiliates and partners. Some of these partners are occupational safety and health providers such as Cal/OSHA Consultation Service, the Department of Health Services, and the University of California.

The goal of State Fund’s Employer Education Series is to present valuable information from recognized safety and health experts to enable employers to reduce the frequency and severity of workplace injuries, facilitate regulatory compliance, and increase business profits.

The program venues provide the opportunity for attendees to have their workplace safety questions immediately and personally answered by industry experts. The typically half-day seminars are usually held at regional State Fund offices.

To learn what programs are scheduled in your area, visit www.scif.com and click on Seminars.

Reporting Work-Related Injuries

State Fund’s Claims Reporting Center (1-888-222-3211) is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for policyholders to report injuries as soon as they occur. Agents will do the necessary paperwork to get the claim started and refer the injured to the designated physician or provider.

Within 8 hours of any serious illness or injury (requiring hospitalization over 24 hours, other than for medical observation or where there is permanent employee disfigurement) or death occurring in the workplace or in connection with employment, employers must report the incident to the Division of Occupational Safety and Health.

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