Seven Statistics on Spiders and Snakes

Outdoor workers are at risk for encountering venomous spiders and snakes while performing their jobs. Here are seven statistics relating to potential interactions with these critters.

1. There are two species of black widow spiders found in Canada—the Western Black Widow found in BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and the Northern Black Widow found in Ontario. Only female black widow spiders bite humans—and they do so only when they feel threatened. Bites can cause severe pain, but are generally not considered life-threatening. (Nature Conservancy Canada)
2. In the United States there are three types of venomous spiders: the black widow, the brown recluse and the hobo spider.
3. To avoid spider bites, outdoor workers should do these seven things: inspect and shake out clothing, shoes, towels and equipment before use; wear long-sleeved shirts, long pants, hats, glasses and boots when handling stacked or undisturbed piles of material; minimize empty spaces between stacked materials; remove and reduce debris and rubbish from outdoor work areas; trim or eliminate tall grass in outdoor work areas; store apparel and outdoor equipment in tightly closed plastic bags; and update their tetanus booster shots every 10 years, as spider bites can become infected with tetanus spores. (US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
4. There are four types of venomous snakes found in the United States: rattlesnakes, copperheads, cottonmouths/water moccasins and coral snakes. Rattlesnakes are the only venomous snakes found in southern Canada.
5. Six tips workers should observe to avoid snake bites include: never handling any snake you see; staying out of tall grass and piles of leaves whenever possible; avoiding climbing on rocks or piles of wood; being aware that snakes tend to be active at night and in warm weather; wearing

boots and long pants when working outdoors; and wearing heavy leather gloves when handling brush and debris. (US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)

6. If a worker is bitten by a snake, he or she should take these five steps: inform a supervisor without delay; seek medical attention as soon as possible; keep still and calm; try to remember the shape, color and markings on the snake that bit you to help ensure appropriate treatment in hospital; and if you can't get to a hospital immediately, get help from a co-worker trained in first aid. First aid measures include having the bite victim sit or lie down with the bite site kept below heart level; wash the bite with soap and water; and cover the bite area with a clean, dry dressing. (US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention)
7. When outdoor workers need to remove debris, two tools that can help keep them safe are a rake or a hoe. These tools can be used to lift objects under which snakes or venomous spiders could be lurking. When picking up a flat piece of debris, pick it up from its far side, so that if there is a snake underneath, the object will serve as a safety barrier. (National Safety Council)

Outdoor workers, especially during warmer months, probably can't imagine toiling in an office or cubicle for hours at a time, shift after shift. Sunshine, fresh air and freedom to move around are among the perks of outdoor work, but there are some additional hazards associated with sharing one's workplace with nature—including unexpected encounters with venomous spiders and snakes. Here are seven statistics relating to potential contact between workers and spiders and snakes: