Stinging Insects

WHAT’S AT STAKE

For outside workers, stinging insects are a summertime job hazard. Stings are usually just an unpleasant annoyance, but occasionally they can cause serious illness and death.

WHAT’S THE DANGER

Wasps, hornets, bees and certain kinds of ants can all deliver stings. Usually the result is no worse than a painful local swelling that clears up in a few days. However, receiving too many stings or a having a severe allergic reaction to a sting can be fatal. People startled by insect stings (or even the threat of them) have been injured in killed in falls, vehicle crashes and contact with moving machinery and powered tools, and workers on horseback have been thrown by alarmed horses.

EXAMPLE

You should learn to identify the stinging insects likely to be found in your area. Stinging insects common through most of the United States and Canada include:

- Wasps
- Hornets
- Yellowjackets
- Honey bees
- Bumblebees

In addition, two aggressive types of stinging insects can be found in the southern United States: fire ants and Africanized honey bees.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

So how can you avoid stings? Start by avoiding the insects. Check out your surroundings before starting work.

Dress to protect yourself. You can wear gloves, long sleeves and long pants. Tuck pants into boots and run tape around clothing at your ankles and wrists. If you must work near bees or wasps, use a hat with netting to cover your head, neck and shoulders.

IF YOU ARE STUNG

Check to see if the stinger is still there. If so, quickly scrape it off. To relieve the burning sensation, itching and swelling, apply ice wrapped in a towel and an anti-itch medication. An antihistamine pill might also help reduce itching and a mild case of hives.

If you are stung around throat, get medical help fast because swelling could make it hard for you to breathe.

Watch for signs of severe allergic reaction in yourself and your companions. These include:

- Hives, itching and swelling in areas other than the site of the sting
- Swollen eyes and eyelids
- Difficulty breathing
- Hoarse voice
- Swelling of the tongue
- Dizziness
- Shock, which can lead to unconsciousness and cardiac arrest

Call for medical help immediately if you observe any of these symptoms. A person who has experienced a severe allergic reaction to a sting in the past needs to carry a bee sting kit, which is an auto-injectable syringe containing epinephrine, at all times. He or she should wear a medical alert bracelet, carry a cellphone and make sure the employer, co-workers and companions know how to use give an injection to stop the reaction.

FINAL WORD

Your best defense against stinging insects is awareness. Learn how to avoid them and what to do if you are stung.