Take the Bite and the Sting out of Working Outdoors

What’s at Stake?

Working outside puts workers at risk for countless hazards. One group of hazards that doesn’t get as much attention are biting and stinging insects and animals.

What’s the Danger?

Often these pesky creatures are little more than a nuisance, but for people allergic to bees and wasp stings, that nuisance can mean a life-threatening situation. Mosquitoes, ticks and stray animals can carry disease such as Zika virus, Lyme disease and rabies. Some spider bites can result in pain and tissue damage and in some cases, can be fatal.

How to Protect Yourself

Mosquitoes, Spiders and Ticks

- To protect yourself from biting and stinging insects, wear long pants, socks, and long-sleeved shirts.
- Tuck pant legs into socks or boots.
- Wear high boots or closed shoes that cover your feet completely.
- Wear a hat.
- Use insect repellents that contain DEET or Picaridin.
- Check before drinking from cups, bottles or cans. Stinging insects are attracted to sweet drinks.
- Avoid wearing heavy perfumes or scented lotions or soaps.
- Avoid fire ants; their bites are painful and cause blisters.
- Severe reactions to fire ant bites (chest pain, nausea, sweating, loss of breath, serious swelling or slurred speech) require immediate medical treatment.

- Treat other, less serious bites and stings with over-the-counter products that relieve pain and prevent infection.

Bees and Wasps

- Be alert! The best protection against bee and wasp stings is to stay away from their hives and nests.
- Bug spray, like the kind you use for mosquitoes, does not work to protect against bees and wasps.
- Wear long sleeve shirts, pants, and closed-toed boots or shoes. Wear a hat with netting, like bee-keepers wear, if you can. Wear light-colored clothing and stay away from bright colors, patterns and black clothing.
- Power tools such as lawnmowers, leaf blowers, weed eaters and chainsaws agitate bees and wasps and may cause them to swarm.
- Don’t swat at bees or wasps or make sudden movements. This may scare or startle them into attacking. Instead, stay calm and let them fly away or walk slowly away.
- If you have disturbed a nest or hive and hear a loud, wild buzzing, protect your face with your hands and run away immediately.

Rodents and Wild or Stray Animals

- Dead and live animals can spread diseases such as Rat Bite Fever and Rabies.
- Avoid contact with wild or stray animals and rats or rat-contaminated buildings. If you can’t avoid contact, wear protective gloves, a respirator or mask if needed, and wash your hands regularly.
- Get rid of dead animals as soon as possible.
- If bitten or scratched, get medical attention immediately.

Snakes

- Watch where you place your hands and feet when removing debris. If possible, don’t place your fingers under debris you are moving. Wear heavy gloves.
- If you see a snake, step back and allow it to proceed.
- Wear boots at least 10 inches high.

- Watch for snakes sunning on fallen trees, limbs or other debris.
- A snake’s striking distance is about 1/2 the total length of the snake.
- If bitten, note the color and shape of the snake’s head to help with treatment.
- Keep bite victims still and calm to slow the spread of venom in case the snake is poisonous. Seek medical attention as soon as possible.
- Do not cut the wound or attempt to suck out the venom. Apply first aid: lay the person down so that the bite is below the level of the heart, and cover the bite with a clean, dry dressing.

Final Word

Don’t let the pests of spring and summer get the best of you. Know how to protect yourself and take the bite and the sting out of working outdoors.