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INSECT STINGS AND BITES: RISKS TO OUTDOOR WORKERS

Outdoor workers are unique in that unlike most of us, they share their workspaces with insects that bite and sting. Connecticut has its fair share of these types of insects, including wasps, bees, hornets, ticks and spiders; each of which can be a threat to outdoor employees. Reactions to insect bites can vary from mild to severe. Mild reactions can include swelling, redness, pain, itching and rashes while to those with are highly allergic, insect bites can be life-threatening. These work-related injuries can lead to increased Workers' Compensation costs with treatments ranging from basic first aid to injuries requiring significant lost work time.

Employers and workers are encouraged to understand the exposure risks, how to recognize and respond to insect stings and bites, and what they can do to prevent them.

To protect employees, it is important for employers to ensure that employees know how to respond to insect bites, especially since some employees are highly allergic. Employers should establish a clear process which is communicated to its employees regarding the importance of reporting these types of incidents. Delayed reporting can not only lead to medical complications but complications associated with Workers' Compensation benefits.

With any exposure it is important to first identify the risk, once this has been accomplished appropriate best practices can be put into place to help manage and reduce the risk to employees. Below are 10 best practices to consider to protect employees:

1. Educate outdoor employees on how to identify flying and crawling insects that can bite.
2. Take extra precautions in areas where insects have been identified. Wear clean, light-colored long-sleeved shirts and long pants. It's important to keep as much skin as possible covered.
3. Communicate to employees who are highly allergic to these insects the importance of reporting incidents, seeking immediate medical treatment if bitten and encourage them to carry their epinephrine auto-injector.
 - *Workers with a history of severe allergic reactions to insect bites or stings should carry an epinephrine auto-injector and wear medical ID jewelry stating their allergy. - NIOSH*
4. Prior to working, avoid applying strongly scented products such as colognes, soaps, shampoos, and lotions.
5. Keep work areas clean and free of foods. Some insects are attracted to food.
6. Apply insect repellent according to the product's directions and wash it off with soap and water after work. Use [Environmental Protection Agency \(EPA\)-registered insect repellents](#) with one of the active ingredients listed below. When used as directed, EPA-registered insect repellents are proven safe and effective, even for pregnant and breastfeeding women. If also using sunscreen, always apply insect repellents after applying sunscreen.

Recommended active ingredients:

- DEET
- Picaridin (known as KBR 3023 and icaridin outside the US)
- IR3535
- Oil of lemon eucalyptus (OLE)
- Para-menthane-diol (PMD)
- 2-undecanone

Find the right insect repellent for you by using [EPA's search tool](#).

7. Inspect the work environment prior to beginning your work. Insects may be hidden in dark corners, or under wood piles, fallen logs or animal carcasses. Areas with abundant flowers attract bugs and bees.
8. Do not disturb hives, mounds or nests. Beware of swarming bees or other insects. Stay calm and leave the area if they become agitated.

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9. Try and remain calm if a stinging insect is flying near you. Swatting at flying insects may cause them to become agitated and can lead to them biting or stinging. If multiple flying insects approach at once, leave the area and go indoors or into a shaded area.
10. If an insect is inside your vehicle, stop slowly and open the windows.¹

Additional steps you can take to help prevent tick bites:

- **Know where to expect ticks.** Ticks live in grassy, brushy, or wooded areas, as well as on animals. Spending time outside walking your dog, camping, gardening, or hunting could bring you in close contact with ticks. Many people are bitten by ticks while in their own yards or neighborhoods.
- **Treat clothing and gear with products containing 0.5% permethrin.** Permethrin can be used to treat boots, clothing and camping gear and can remain protective even through several washings. Alternatively, you can purchase permethrin-treated clothing and gear.
- **Use Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-registered insect repellents** containing DEET, picaridin, IR3535, Oil of Lemon Eucalyptus (OLE), para-menthane-diol (PMD), or 2-undecanone. [EPA's search tool](#) can help you find the product that best suits your needs. Always follow the product's instructions. Note: Do not use products containing OLE or PMD on children under 3 years old.
- **Avoid contact with ticks**
 - Avoid wooded and brushy areas with high grass and leaf litter.
 - Walk in the center of trails.²
- For more information on this topic and other warm weather exposures, please visit [CIRMA's Workplace Safety Center](#) for more additional helpful information.

¹<https://www.safetyandhealthmagazine.com/articles/21359-avoid-the-sting-working-outdoors-with-insects>

²<https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/page/avoid-bug-bites>