

Safety Talk

Poisonous Plants

The most common and widespread poisonous plants in the US are poison ivy, poison oak and poison sumac. These plants are a hazard because they release an oil, urushiol, which causes an allergic reaction when it comes in contact with the skin. It appears as an itchy, red rash with bumps or blisters. Although resulting in "just a rash", this rash can spread all over the body and significantly impede or prevent someone from working.

There are Over-the-Counter lotions that can relieve symptoms for most people; others will require immediate medical attention for severe allergic reactions.

One or more of these 3 plants can be found in every state except Alaska and Hawaii in widely varying habitats like forest, fields, wetlands, roadsides and even urban parks and backyards. Since they are so widespread, it's important to be able to recognize these plants. "Leaves of 3, let it be!" is helpful for identifying poison ivy and poison oak but poison sumac usually has a cluster of 7 to 13 leaves. There is also variation in all these plants depending on the exact type, local environment and the season.

POISON IVY

- Eastern poison ivy is usually a hairy vine with 3 shiny green leaves growing on the same small stem.
- Western poison ivy is usually a low shrub with 3 leaves from the same small stem
- It may have yellow or green flowers and white to green-yellow or amber berries

POISON OAK

- Typically a shrub with 3 leaves from the same small stem
- Pacific poison oak can be vine-like
- May have y
- Yellow or green flowers and cluster of green-yellow or white berries

POISON SUMAC

- Woody shrub with a stem from which 7-13 leaves grow in pairs
- May have glossy, pale yellow or cream-colored berries

Workers can be exposed to the oil through direct contact with the plant, indirect contact, like touching a tool or clothing that has urushiol on them or inhaling the particles from burning plants. Signs of contact with the oil include red rash within a few hours to a few days of contact, possible bumps, patches, streaking or weeping blisters, swelling and itching. The fluid from the blisters will not spread the rash. Staying away from the

plants is the best prevention but sometime contact cannot be avoided. To help minimize the risk, it can be helpful to:

- Wear long sleeves, long pants ,boots and gloves
- Apply barrier creams containing bentoquatam before contact
 - These creams should be washed off and reapplied twice a day
- After use, clean tools with rubbing alcohol or soap with lots of water- urushiol can remain active on surfaces for up to 5 years!
- Wash exposed clothing separately in hot water with detergent.

Although not life threatening, anyone who has suffered through a rash from any one of these plants know they don't want to do it again. The symptoms and discomfort can be minimized with anti-itch lotions and severe cases may require a visit to the doctor to help get the itching under control.

Discussion Questions

"Leaves of three, let it be!" is a good warning for which of the poisonous plants?

Why is it important to clean off tools with rubbing alcohol after they've been in contact with any of these plants?

MEETING / TRAINING ATTENDANCE ROSTER

COMPANY: _____

_____ SAFETY MEETING

JOB/DEPT: _____

_____ SAFETY TRAINING

DATE: ___/___/___

TIME: _____

TOPICS ADDRESSED: _____

EMPLOYEE'S SIGNATURES

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

EMPLOYEE SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: _____

ACTION TAKEN: _____

Supervisor's Signature

_____/_____/_____
Date

Safety Coordinator's Signature

_____/_____/_____
Date