

# eSafetyLine Article

## Ticks, Spiders and Snakes

As the weather warms up, the number of potential hazards faced by our employees increase, and not all of them are directly work task-related. Nature also throws in hazards that endanger our employees' safety; these include ticks and the diseases they carry, venomous spiders and venomous snakes. The CDC has determined that 40- 50 people die each year from severe allergic reactions to these animals, many of them construction workers. Their reach is wide-spread; virtually every state has some representatives from these three groups of animals.

The best way to prevent an unwanted encounter is through prevention and this begins with knowing what you're up against. These groups have similarities; they're more prevalent in the warmer weather and anyone that spends time outside runs the risk of encountering any or all of them. It can be more helpful to look at their differences by looking at the groups separately.

### Ticks and Tick-Borne Diseases

The tick, and therefore the disease they carry, that you will come across depends largely on where you live, as most ticks are regional. The deer tick, which carries Lyme disease, is found mainly in the Northeast, North Central and Pacific Coast of the US. Ironically, the tick responsible for Rocky Mountain spotted fever is found nowhere near Colorado but along the Atlantic Coast and in the Southeast.

There are two tick-borne diseases that can be found throughout the US; tularemia (with the exception of Hawaii) and Q fever. Since there are many tick-borne diseases it can be difficult to list all the symptoms that may arise. Some of the more common include body and/or muscle aches, fever, fatigue, headache, joint pain, rash and facial paralysis. The main problem with this list is that those infected may not have all of them and most can occur with other non-tick related diseases. This is why it's crucial to know what types of ticks are common to your area and their specific characteristics and symptoms.

### Venomous Spiders

There are thousands of species of spiders in the US and only three are dangerous to humans due to their venom. They are the Black Widow, Brown Recluse and hobo spiders and while they are found mainly outside they can all be found inside buildings and structures.

The Black Widow is most common in the southern and western US but can be found throughout North America. They are identified by a red pattern located on the underside of the abdomen. The brown recluse, or the violin spider, is found in the Midwest and southern US, while occasionally along the East Coast. They're brown with a dark violin or fiddle shaped marking on the head.

The hobo spider is a large, brown spider with yellow markings on its abdomen found throughout the Pacific Northwest that doesn't climb but can run very quickly. All prefer secluded, dry, sheltered areas to set up their webs and will typically only bite a human when the web has been disturbed or contacted. Spider bites are painful and because of the venom, tissue surrounding the bite can become damaged. While none of their bites are typically life threatening, they should all be treated as serious medical issues and professional medical attention consulted.

## **Venomous Snakes**

Rattlesnakes are the most common venomous snake in the US, found in virtually every state in many different habitats including mountains, prairies, deserts and beaches. They have the ability to strike at up to 1/3 their body length. Most rattlesnakes will use their tails or rattles as a warning if they feel threatened.

Copperheads are most likely to be found in forests, rocky areas, swamps or near lakes and rivers in the eastern states but can be found as far west as Texas. Their body color varies from reddish to a golden tan with hourglass shaped bands across the body. They have a nonaggressive temperament and will often freeze when startled. Most bites occur when the snake is unknowingly stepped on or near.

Cottonmouths, also called water moccasins, are dark tan, brown or nearly black with vague black or dark brown cross-bands, which scare easily and will readily defend themselves. They are found in the southeastern states in and around wetland areas, rivers and lakes. Coral snakes have bright bands of yellow, red and black causing it to be confused with the non-venomous Scarlet King snake or Milk snake. To tell the differences between them remember "red and yellow can kill a fella; red and black is a friend of Jack". This highly venomous snake is very shy preferring to hide in leaf piles or burrow into the ground in wooded, sandy or marsh areas of the southern US.

An important aspect of keeping your employees safe from all three of these potentially dangerous animals can be as simple as proper jobsite housekeeping. All these animals like to be left undisturbed in various types of piles of wood or brick, brush or debris that's left around. By keeping up with jobsite housekeeping many of these organisms would have no place to live. It's also important to be aware of the specific representatives of each of these groups that are common in your area so your employees will know what to look for.

*For additional help with safety and OSHA compliance, take advantage of the resources available through NCMA. These resources include the NCMA Block Plant Safety Software. The software is available from NCMA at (703) 713-1900 at a cost of \$150 for up to 3 plants/year (nonmember \$450).*