Working Outdoors: Focus On

The Risks

Working outside in the heat exposes workers to the possibility of a heat-related illness. In fact, heat-related fatality cases show that with temperatures above just 70°F/21°C can present a heat hazard when work activities are at or above a moderate workload. Other hazards of working outside in the summer include exposure to Ultraviolet (UV) radiation, Lyme Disease/Tick-Borne Disease, West Nile Virus, and Poison-Ivy Related Plants.

Be a Better Supervisor

Sun

Sunlight contains ultraviolet (UV) radiation, which causes premature aging of the skin, wrinkles, cataracts, and skin cancer. Here’s how employees can block those harmful rays.

Cover up and wear loose-fitting, long-sleeved shirts and long pants. Use sunscreen with a sun protection factor (SPF) of at least 30. Wear a hat with a wide brim hat, not a baseball cap, because it protects the neck, ears, eyes, forehead, nose, and scalp. Wear UV-absorbent sunglasses – they don’t have to be expensive, but they should block 99 to 100 percent of UVA and UVB radiation. Check the product tag or label. Lastly, limit sun exposure – UV rays are most intense between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.

Heat

The combination of heat and humidity can be a serious health threat during the summer months. There are three kinds of major heat-related disorders—heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Train your employees know how to recognize each one and what first aid treatment is necessary.

Lyme Disease/Tick-Borne Diseases

Lyme disease and other tick-borne illnesses (i.e., Rocky Mountain spotted fever) are transmitted by bacteria from bites of infected deer (blacklegged) ticks.

Protection involves wearing light-colored clothes to see ticks more easily; long sleeves and tucking pant legs into socks or boots – high boots and closed shoes are a must; and putting on a hat. Other safe work practices to enforce include the use of tick repellants; encouraging workers to check themselves for ticks directly after work and shower when they get home; and wash and dry work clothes at high temperature.

If any ticks are found remove them promptly and carefully by gripping the tick with fine-tipped tweezers and removing them – DON’T use petroleum jelly, a hot match, or nail polish to remove the tick.

West Nile Virus

West Nile virus is transmitted by the bite of an infected mosquito. Workers can protect against mosquito bites in these ways – applying Picaridin or insect repellent with DEET to exposed skin; spraying clothing with repellents containing DEET or permethrin. (Do not spray permethrin directly onto exposed skin.) Wearing long sleeves, long pants, and socks; being extra vigilant at dusk and dawn when mosquitoes are most active; and getting rid of sources of standing water (used tires, buckets) to reduce or eliminate mosquito breeding areas.

Poison Ivy-Related Plants

Poison ivy, poison oak and poison sumac have poisonous sap (urushiol) in their roots, stems, leaves and fruits. About 85% of the population will develop an allergy if exposed to poison ivy, oak or sumac. Forestry workers and firefighters who battle forest fires have developed rashes or lung irritations from inhaling the smoke of burning plants.

Protection again starts by wearing long-sleeved shirts and long pants, tucked into boots and wearing cloth or leather gloves and applying barrier creams to exposed skin. Educate workers on the identification of poison ivy, oak, and sumac plants and on signs and symptoms of contact with poisonous ivy, oak, and sumac and keep rubbing alcohol accessible. It removes the oily resin up to 30 minutes after exposure.