



TOOLBOX TALKS

SUPERVISOR INSTRUCTIONS:

- Use toolbox trainings to encourage safety/environmental discussions during monthly meetings with employees.
- Campus Services' employees should maintain the employee sign-in sheet in their department's safety/environmental compliance binder as a record of training. All other groups should maintain a record of training in accordance with their Division's training procedures.

As we transition from winter into the spring season, we need to be mindful of the poison varieties of plants and insects while working outside. This toolbox deals with poison ivy specifically, but there are other plants and insects that people may be sensitive to; therefore, it is important to use caution when working outdoors whether at work or at home.



Poison ivy, western poison oak, and poison sumac contain the poisonous oil, Urushiol. The oil is found not only in the leaves of these plants but in their roots, stems and fruit as well. The oil is released when the plant is bruised. It may be deposited on the skin by direct contact with the plant or by contact with contaminated objects such as the fur of pets, clothing, gloves, shoes, tools or other objects and then transferred to the skin. Severe cases have occurred from Urushiol-coated soot in the smoke of burning plants.

Poison ivy is one of the most common causes of allergic contact dermatitis in the United States. 15% to 30% of people have no allergic response to Urushiol oil; however, the majority of people will become sensitized with repeated or more concentrated exposure to the oil. Reactions can progress from a rash to anaphylaxis - a severe, life-threatening allergic reaction.

Poison Ivy Facts

- Urushiol is **extremely** potent; ¼ ounce is enough to cause a rash in every person on earth.
- Urushiol can stay active on any surface for up to 5 years.
- Poison ivy grows in vines and small low lying shrubs and has three distinct leaves
- The leaves change color; bright red in the spring, green in the summer, reddish/yellow/orange in the fall.
- Poison ivy grows everywhere in the US except at extreme altitudes and far western deserts.
- Poison ivy is one of the most common causes of allergic dermatitis in the United States with over 350,000 people affected annually.



The first symptom of exposure is a severe itching of the skin. Usually within 15 minutes of contact, the Urushiol binds to skin proteins. If it is washed off with soap and water before that time, a reaction may be prevented. After it is fixed, however, it cannot be washed off or transferred to other areas.

SAFETY/ENVIRONMENTAL TOOLBOX TALKS – HAZARDS OF SPRING SAFETY

Approximately 24 hours after a sensitized person is exposed, a blistery, itching rash develops. In severe cases, oozing sores develop. The rash spreads by the Urushiol, not as the result of contamination from sores. The blood vessels develop gaps that leak fluid through the skin, causing blisters and oozing.

Preventing Exposure

The best protection is to avoid contact with the plants. However, if you must work with questionable vegetation, wear gloves and long sleeves and don't allow the vegetation to touch your skin. Also, do not touch your skin with any portion of the personal protective equipment (PPE) or clothing that has been in contact with the vegetation or you could transfer the irritating oils from your clothing to your skin.

In addition, the FDA approved Bantoquatam 5%, which is available without a prescription. It provides a protection barrier when applied at least 15 minutes before exposure and reapplied every 4 hours. Bantoquatam lotion is sold under the trade name *Ivy Block*.

Identifying the Plants

The compound leaves of poison ivy consist of three pointed leaflets; the middle leaflet has a much longer stalk than the two side ones. The leaflet edges can be smooth or toothed but are rarely lobed. The leaves vary greatly in size, from about one-half inch to two inches in length. They are reddish when they emerge in the spring, turn green during the summer, and become various shades of yellow, orange or red in the autumn. Later in the season, clusters of poisonous, berry-like drupes form. They are whitish with a waxy look.

One saying to keep in mind is "leaflets of three, let it be." That is one guarantee of poison ivy, the leaves will always come in groups of three – ALWAYS. Unfortunately, many other "safe" plants also grow this way so take precautions and be careful when working outside.



Poison Ivy in Spring



Poison Ivy in Summer



Poison Ivy in Fall



Poison Ivy Berries

Treating Exposure

- Gently cleanse the skin with mild soap and water as soon as possible to remove any unabsorbed oil. Particular attention should be given to cleaning fingernails.
- For mild cases, cool water and an over-the-counter product that eases itching may be effective.
- Oatmeal baths and baking-soda mixtures may also sooth the discomfort. Weeping vesicles should be dried using cool compresses.
- Thoroughly wash all potentially contaminated clothing.
- Seek medical treatment for severe allergic reactions.

Questions for Discussion

1. True or False. Urushiol, is found in the roots, stems, leaves and fruit of poison ivy?
Answer: True

2. True or False. To treat poison ivy, the skin should be gently cleansed with mild soap and water to remove the unabsorbed oil?
Answer: True

3. True or False. It is advisable to wear long sleeves and gloves when contact with poison ivy is possible?
Answer: True

4. How much Urushiol oil is needed to cause a rash in every person on earth?
 - a. ¼ ounce
 - b. 5 ounces
 - c. 8 ounces**Answer:** ¼ ounce

Credits

Image source: "Poison Ivy." <http://www.poison-ivy.org/>