

Summer HAZARDS

Summer is well underway and, for many, that means enjoying vacations, swimming and boating. But for employees who work outdoors, summertime is not a day at the beach. For them, it can mean hazards, such as heat stroke—which can be severe enough to cause brain damage or even death—heat exhaustion and sunburn from overexposure to the sun. Also, insects are more aggressive during the summer months, making insect bites and stings a heightened safety concern. Keeping employees aware of these hazards and insisting upon preventive measures can protect your workers and avoid lost man-hours.

Protect your employees from summer heat and pest dangers with these pointers from a horticultural insurance professional.

Heat stroke. Humidity is high when temperatures rise above 90°, and it can be difficult for employees to stay cool when working in the sun. Heat stroke warning symptoms include: very hot and dry skin (an individual suffering from heat stroke will not be sweating); a strong, fast pulse with a very high body temperature (106° to 112°); confused, strange or angry behavior; chills, nausea or dizziness; and unconsciousness.

If an employee is experiencing these symptoms, contact emergency personnel right away. Apply a cool, wet cloth to the victim's head, armpits, groin and chest areas. Use a fan and/or cold packs, if available. Keep the victim lying down with his or her feet raised.

To avoid heat stroke, tell employees:

- Take frequent breaks and drink plenty of chilled water or sports drinks. Even if you do not feel thirsty, the body is losing fluids, which need to be replenished. Sports drinks are beneficial because they help replace the minerals you lose when you sweat. Avoid caffeinated drinks, which can cause dehydration.

- If you know you will be exposed to greater heat or humidity than normal, spend time in similar conditions for several days to help your body adjust.

Heat exhaustion. Heat exhaustion is more difficult to diagnose than heat stroke; however, it is far less serious unless it's ignored. The onset of heat exhaustion usually is accompanied by dizziness, faintness, fatigue, weakness, anxiety and nausea. The skin can turn cool and moist, and often the victim will experience drenching sweats. Heat exhaustion can lead to circulatory collapse, with symptoms including: cold, pale, clammy skin; a slow pulse; and disorientation, followed by unconsciousness.

If an employee suffers from heat exhaustion, he or she should be moved to a cool or shady area. Place the victim flat or with his or her head slightly down. When the victim starts responding, small amounts of a sports drink or sugar water can be given, which will help replace lost electrolytes from profuse sweating. Apply a cool, damp cloth to the back of the neck and forehead or use a fan, if available, to help the employee cool down. Also, lightly spraying the person with water will help.

by ANDREW J. MAUSCHBAUGH

Sports drinks are beneficial because they help replace the minerals you lose when you sweat. Avoid caffeinated drinks, which can cause dehydration.

To avoid heat exhaustion, tell employees:

- Before going outside, eat a light meal that can be digested easily, and avoid foods high in fat and protein.
- Wear loose, lightweight clothing.
- Apply sun block.
- Drink plenty of water before going out into the sun, and continue to drink water or sports drinks throughout the day. Avoid caffeinated beverages.

Sunburnt. When the skin is overexposed to the ultraviolet (UV) rays of the sun, sunburn occurs. Everyone is at risk for sunburn; however, the time it takes to sustain sunburn depends on the age of the person, skin type and color, geographical location, altitude, time of day and the time of year. Keep in mind that every time someone gets a blistering sunburn, their risk of developing a type of skin cancer doubles.

To prevent sunburn, tell employees:

- If possible, avoid being in direct sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. when UV rays are strongest. Rays also are stronger at higher altitudes.
- Use a sunscreen with a sun protection factor, or SPF, of 15 or greater. Apply to all exposed body parts, paying special attention to the face, nose, ears and shoulders. Apply sunscreen 30 minutes prior to sun exposure to allow for penetration. Use a waterproof product if sweating may occur. Continue to use sunscreen on cloudy days because skin still is susceptible to burning by UV rays.
- Know of any possible side effects of medications you are taking. Some medications, such as antibiotics, can make a person more susceptible to sunburn.
- Wear tightly woven, light-colored fabrics with long sleeves and long pants to protect exposed skin.
- Wear a hat with a wide brim to protect your face and head.
- Wear sunglasses with UV protection and lip balm with sunscreen.



It can be difficult for employees to stay cool when working in the sun. The onset of heat exhaustion usually is accompanied by dizziness, faintness, fatigue, weakness, anxiety and nausea. The skin can turn cool and moist, and often the victim will experience drenching sweats.

Skin cancer warning signs. More than 700,000 new cases of skin cancer occur each year. The most common type of skin cancer is basal cell carcinoma, which is caused by chronic exposure to the sun. It most frequently is found on exposed body parts (scalp, forehead, face, nose, neck and back). Men who work outdoors are the most common victims.

Important precautions include examining your skin from head to toe at least once every three months and paying special attention to birthmarks, moles and blemishes. Look for the warning signs, or ABCDE, of skin cancer if you notice a mark or spot on your skin:

- Asymmetry — One half of a mole or birthmark does not match the other half in size or shape.
- Border —The edges are irregular, ragged, notched or blurred.
- Color — The color is not the same all over. Look for differing shades of brown or black, maybe with patches of red, white or blue,
- Diameter —The area is larger than 6 millimeters (the size of a No. 2 pencil eraser) or is growing larger.
- Elevation — The mark is elevated or

raised from the skin.

If you notice any of these skin cancer warning signs, consult a physician immediately. If caught early enough, many skin cancers can be treated easily and successfully.

Bee stings. Insect stings are another concern during the summer months. One of the most worrisome is the bee sting. Although bees normally do not attack unless provoked, it still is best to steer clear of them if possible.

To avoid bee stings, tell employees:

- Wear light-colored clothing that is tightly woven and covers your arms and legs.
- Always wear shoes. Most bee stings occur on feet.
- Be cautious around plants that attract bees.
- Remember, insect repellent does not deter bees.

If an employee should have a negative reaction to a bee sting, seek emergency help as soon as possible. Symptoms of a reaction include a rash, a swollen face, shortness of breath, wheezing, dizziness or fatigue.

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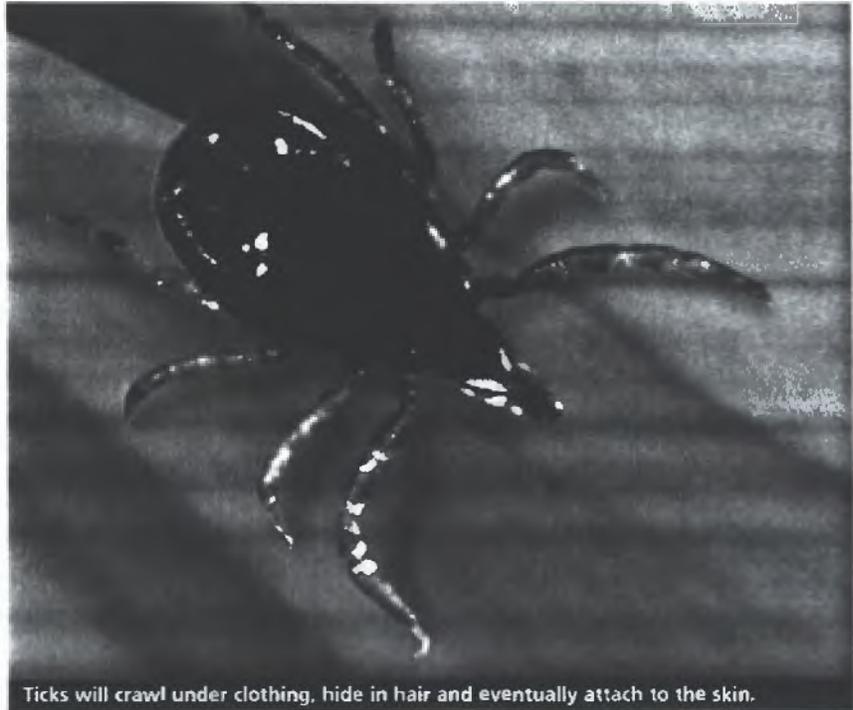


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Ticks will crawl under clothing, hide in hair and eventually attach to the skin.

Multiple stings can cause vomiting, diarrhea, headache or fever. These symptoms are not as serious, but a doctor still should be consulted.

Wasp, yellow jacket and hornet control. Thousands of people in the US die each year from allergic reactions to the venom of wasps, yellow jackets and hornets. All are more dangerous than bees and should be treated with care and caution.

Wasps typically build their nests under ledges. Yellow jacket nests often are located underground in an old rodent burrow, beneath landscape timber, or in a rock wall or wall of a building.

If the nest can be located, it usually can be eliminated by carefully applying a wasp spray insecticide into the nest opening. These sprays are sold at most grocery and hardware stores. An advantage of this type of elimination is they can spray from as far as 20 feet away. Another advantage is most insecticide sprays cause insects to drop instantly upon contact.

The best time to treat for wasps and yellow jackets is at night. Find the nest opening during the daytime. Approach the nest slowly, and do not shine a flashlight directly into the nest entrance, as this may startle the insects. Instead, cast the beam to the side to illuminate the nest indirectly; and place the light on the ground rather than in your hand. Be careful not to stand directly below a nest when spraying.

Following treatment, wait at least a day before removing the nest to make

sure all the wasps have been killed, then scrape or knock down the nest. This will prevent secondary problems from carpet beetles, ants and other scavenging insects. If wasps continue to be observed, the application may need to be repeated.

Hornets are more difficult and dangerous to control than wasps and yellow jackets. Hornet nests resemble large, inverted, teardrop-shaped balls that usually are attached to a tree, bush or side of a building. The nests may contain thousands of hornets, which are extremely aggressive when disturbed. The nests often are located out of reach, and removal should be done only by a professional pest-control company.

Stings from a wasp, yellow jacket or hornet are only a concern if the employee has an allergic reaction. All stings can be treated very much the same. Remove the stinger immediately, and apply ice to the stung area. Then wash the site thoroughly, and apply an antibiotic ointment, such as Neosporin. If there is itching, take an antihistamine, such as Benadryl, or if there is pain, take ibuprofen.

Mosquito bites and West Nile virus. Mosquitoes are more likely to bite around dawn and dusk, although some also bite during the day. These pests breed in stagnant or standing bodies of water; treat the water to control mosquito larvae. If your business has a large accumulation of old tires, that is another prime breeding spot for mosquitoes. Old tires should be discarded.

To deter mosquitoes, tell employees:

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- Apply insect repellent containing DEET whenever you're outdoors. Sweating or getting wet may mean reapplying repellent more frequently.
- When possible, wear long sleeves and long pants treated with insect repellent containing DEET or a permethrin clothing treatment because mosquitoes may bite through thin clothes. If you spray your clothes, there is no need to spray repellent containing DEET on the skin under your clothing.
- Limit the number of places available for mosquitoes to lay their eggs by eliminating standing water sources from around your business.

The chances of becoming ill with West Nile virus from an infected mosquito bite are very low, even in areas where the virus has been reported. It has been estimated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) that approximately 20 percent of people who become infected with West Nile virus will develop mild symptoms, including fever, headache, body aches and, occasionally, a skin rash around the trunk of the body and swollen lymph glands. These symptoms last a few days.

Fewer than 1 percent of people who become infected after being bitten by a mosquito carrying the virus will get severely ill. According to the CDC, approximately 1 in 150 people infected with West Nile virus will develop a more severe form of the disease. Symptoms of severe infection include headache, high fever, neck stiffness, stupor, disorientation, coma, tremors, convulsions, muscle weakness and paralysis. These symptoms may last several weeks or longer. The incubation period of the West Nile virus in humans is normally three to 14 days.

Tick prevention. Approximately 200 species of ticks live in the US, and most are about the size of the head of a pin. A tick will attach itself to the skin to suck blood for survival. Some species can carry Lyme disease or Rocky Mountain spotted fever, two of the most common diseases transmitted by ticks in the US.

Habitats for ticks include wooded areas with thick undergrowth of shrubs and small trees, beach grass, lawns, forests and woodland edges. They usually climb up long grass blades or low brush and then attach themselves to animals or people passing by. Ticks will crawl under clothing, hide in hair and eventually attach to the skin.

To protect from ticks, tell employees:

- Wear light-colored clothing to spot ticks easily.
- Tuck pant legs into your boots or

socks to prevent ticks from contacting skin.

- Use insect repellents with DEET.
- Inspect yourself daily for ticks, especially after working in a wooded area, and pay special attention to your head, scalp, back, neck, armpits and groin area.
- If you find a tick on your body, don't cover it with petroleum jelly, rubbing alcohol or fingernail polish. These items do not make the tick come out and often can make removal more difficult.

A person who is bitten by a tick usually won't feel the bite. There may be redness on the skin where the bite occurred, and sometimes a rash is present.

Insects are more aggressive during the summer months, making insect bites and stings a heightened safety concern.

To remove a tick, use tweezers to grasp the tick's mouth close to the surface of the skin, and with a steady motion, pull the tick straight out. If any of the tick parts are left behind, they should be removed using a sterile needle or pin. Once the tick is removed, place the tick in a jar to show a physician, who can determine the type of tick and if it is a carrier of Lyme disease or Rocky Mountain spotted fever.

A tick usually has to remain attached for 36 to 48 hours to infect a person with a disease. However, if caught early, diseases may be cured. Symptoms of Lyme disease include fever, headache, stiff neck or neck pain, muscle aches, joint pain, fatigue, chills, swollen lymph nodes and a red, circular skin rash. Symptoms of Rocky Mountain spotted fever include headache, rash and nausea or vomiting. Seek medical attention if any of these symptoms occur after a tick bite.

Don't let heat-related illnesses and injuries stop your employees from doing their jobs this summer. Ensuring they are aware of these common hazards, how to treat them and the preventive measures to take can help protect your employees — and your business.

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