

March 2007

RM News & Notes



Safety Tip of the Day

Myth vs. Facts

Myth: Poison Ivy rash is contagious.

The rash will only occur where urushiol oil has touched the skin. However, it may seem to spread as the rash often appears over time instead of all at once. This can result from urushiol being absorbed at different rates over different parts of the body or because of repeated exposure, from contaminated objects or urushiol left under the fingernails. **Note:** Be careful where your pets roam. They aren't allergic but can transfer the urushiol oil to you causing a reaction

Myth: You can catch poison ivy simply by being near the plants.

Direct contact is needed; however, you can get it from the smoke of burning plants or anything else that can cause the oil to become airborne such as a lawnmower, trimmer, etc.

Truth / Myth: Leaves of three let them be.

Poison Ivy and Oak generally do have 3 leaves per cluster; however, poison sumac has 7 to 13 leaves on a branch.

Myth: Do not worry about dead plants.

Urushiol oil may remain active on surfaces, including dead plants, for years.

Myth: I've been in poison ivy many times and never broken out. I'm immune.

Not necessarily true. Most people are allergic to urushiol oil. It's a matter of time and exposure. The more times you are exposed, the more likely it is that you will break out with an allergic rash. For the first time sufferer, it generally takes longer for the rash to show up - usually in 7 to 10 days.

Myth: Breaking the blisters releases urushiol oil that can spread.

Not true. But your wounds can become infected and may cause scarring.

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Message from the Risk Manager

Leaves of three; let them be. I've heard that saying all my life but was never really sure which plant was poison ivy. I expect some of you aren't either as we usually have several job related exposures each year and probably even more from personal activities. I've tried to wade through the information out there, some of it contradictory, and compile everything I found to give you the best information possible. However, I certainly didn't go out and "test" any of the information, so use at your own discretion. It seems the only sure method of preventing the poison ivy rash is to avoid the plant, and to do this you have to be able to identify it. I found out that I've been avoiding the harmless, Virginia creeper more often than poison ivy. I also noticed that poison ivy can look very different, depending on location and time of year. Even though I've tried to give you "identification" information, if you're like me, you prefer pictures. If you want pictures, one website that I found to be particularly helpful is www.poison-ivy.org. They also have personal stories and a quiz that helps you learn to identify the plant. Largely because of this site, I really think that I will know poison ivy when I see it so that I can avoid it. I've never had the misery of a poison ivy rash and certainly don't want to start now.

Darlene

Safety Officer News and Notes

Treatment/First Aid

If you know you've been exposed, a cortisone shot or prescription topical corticosteroid drugs from your doctor may stop the reaction, but only if treatment begins within a few hours of exposure.

Once the rash appears you will be very itchy, probably for a couple of weeks. Although there is no general consensus on products that work, the following may offer some relief from itching and help dry up the oozing:

- Topical Corticosteroid creams (Cortaid, Lanacort...)
- Antihistamine (benadryl...)
- Aluminum acetate (Burrows solution)
- Baking soda – make a paste with 3 teaspoons of baking soda and 1 teaspoon of water
- Aveeno (oatmeal bath)
- Aluminum hydroxide gel
- Calamine
- Kaolin
- Zinc acetate, carbonate or oxide

Call your doctor if you experience:

- Pus around the rash
- Rash around mouth, eyes or genitals
- Fever above 100 degrees
- Rash that doesn't heal after a week

Call for Emergency Medical Assistance for:

- Swelling of the throat, tongue or lips
- Difficulty swallowing
- Difficulty breathing
- Weakness or Dizziness
- Bluish lips

Identification

Poison Ivy may appear as a ground cover, shrub or woody vine growing up a tree. Older vines are covered in fibrous “hairy” roots that grow into the supporting tree. Normally, leaves appear in groups of three leaflets on a small stem coming off the larger main stem. Some leaflets may be slightly lobed. Leaves are a dark, waxy green during the summer and turn red in the fall.

From May through July, poison ivy may exhibit yellow or green flower clusters. From August to November, white clusters of berries develop which can stay through winter and on into spring if not eaten by birds.

Poison ivy can be found throughout eastern North America. It grows in open woods, along fences and stone walls, beside roads and waste places. It particularly likes edges of newly disturbed areas such as the perimeters of subdivisions and home lots. On roadsides and open areas, you'll mostly find ground cover. Woods have more poison ivy vines on the trees and the sandy, coastal areas produce more of an erect shrub.

Quick Action Needed



Leaves of three, let them be...

If you've been exposed to Poison Ivy, quickly removing the urushiol oil is essential. Rinse skin immediately with cool water and cleanse with isopropyl rubbing alcohol, if available. Carefully remove exposed clothing and wash in soap and water. Take a regular shower with soap and cool to warm (not hot) water. Clean all shoes, tools and anything else that may have contacted the plant with alcohol or other appropriate solvent, making sure to use gloves and/or other protective coverings when doing this and then discard the hand covering.

Safety Stories

Poison Ivy Attacks

Being a bit of a procrastinator, I watched the weeds in my flower beds grow to rather exceptional heights and then decided to use my July 4th holiday to make a “clean sweep” of the mess. Being afraid of getting sunburned, I put on long sleeves, long pants, and gloves – I was ready! I methodically started at one side and thoroughly followed each vine to the ground and got to the roots – yank!. I was making rather remarkable progress and wasn't taking particular attention of what kind of plant or vine I was pulling. The piles of debris on the grass were mounting high, and by the end of the day, there was quite an improvement. However, I was just too tired to worry about the piles of debris and rationalized that I would wait a few days until they dried out a bit and won't take up so much space when I bagged them. So, a few days later, I came home from work and quickly began stuffing dried leaves and vines into plastic bags. As I tied up the last bag, I thought that maybe I should have put on some protective clothing but decided just to go in and take a quick shower as a preventative measure. Seven days later, the skin on my arms had an interesting mottled look and itched to high heaven. I was having my first (and only, hopefully) poison ivy reaction. I went to the drug store, got the appropriate cream, and hoped for the best. Two days later, I was at the doctors with my arms so swollen the sleeves of my clothing would not fit over them. After a regime of several medicines, the swelling was reduced but it was many weeks before the rash and itching finally disappeared. So, my initial attempt not to get sunburned also kept the poison ivy away, but I had assumed that once the plants had dried up a bit that I didn't have to worry about the poison in the poison ivy – WRONG!! When in doubt, cover up – you'll never be sorry!

Up Coming Events

Each program is advertised by Risk Management and is available to each employee of Columbia County and the city employees of Grovetown and Harlem. Additionally, the Defensive Driving Courses may be attended by immediate family members of employees, on a space available basis, for a nominal fee.

Pre-registration is required.

For additional information or to register contact Risk Management. 706-312-7475

Safety Review Board April 13, 2007

**Defensive Driving
Course – 8 hour February 6, 2007
March 20, 2007
April 17, 2007
May 10, 2007**

**Defensive Driving
Course – 4 hour February 15, 2007
April 26, 2007**

**CPR/AED/First Aid March 8, 2007
May 15, 2007**

County Office Closed May 28, 2007

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Handy Hints

What about immunity to Poison Ivy?

Some people appear to be immune, others become immune. HOWEVER, you can gain or lose immunity, so to assume you can't get it if you never have before is foolish. People change as they age. I would never assume that I was immune at any time no matter what my past experience was.

WISHING YOU A

Happy St. Patrick's Day
March 17th

