

Dealing With **Bugs &** **Critters**



If you're involved in maintaining grounds or buildings, your job routinely takes you outdoors. That means exposure to pests—flying, creeping, crawling critters that can bite, sting and cause serious harm.

You have to know how to recognize and avoid these dangerous pests. You need to know what protective equipment you have to wear. And you must know what to do if you're bitten or stung.

Protect Yourself

Prevention is the best defense when you know you might meet insects or snakes on the job.

- Wear a hat.
- Wear heavy-duty gloves.
- Wear leather boots.
- Expose as little skin as possible.
- Wear a one-piece suit, such as a jumpsuit, if possible.
- Wear light-colored long pants and long-sleeved shirts.
- Tuck pant legs into boots and shirts into pants.
- Check any clothing you've worn previously in the field before you put it on.
- Spray clothing with an insect repellent containing DEET.
- Don't wear strong-smelling cologne or perfume.
- Keep your hands and feet out of areas you can't see into.
- Do an all-over body check when you get home.

These honeybees were displaced from their hive. They are surrounding their queen, protecting her and keeping her warm, while searching for a new home. If you find bees like these, don't disturb them. Call a bee-removal service. Often, they will remove honeybees for free.

Know Your Insects

Mosquitoes

Everyone knows how annoying mosquitoes can be. But they can do more than annoy you. They can infect you with serious diseases, such as encephalitis, a viral infection of the brain that can kill you.

- Apply mosquito repellent every two to three hours.
- Since mosquitoes are attracted to dark clothing, wear the lightest colors possible.
- Within three days of exposure to mosquitoes, watch for signs of encephalitis, such as headache, fever, nausea, and vomiting. If you have any of these symptoms, see a doctor immediately.

Bees, Wasps, Yellow Jackets and African Honey Bees

Animals that sting kill more people each year than all other venomous animals combined. Yellow jackets can sting repeatedly. Honey bees have barbed stingers that remain in your skin. African Honey Bees can threaten your life. Even if you're not sensitive to bee toxin, multiple stings can cause anaphylactic shock, a life-threatening allergic reaction.

- Look for swarms. It may mean a hive is nearby.
- Bee hives and yellow-jacket nests are found in hollow trees, culverts and hanging from tree limbs.
- Keep food and drinks in your vehicle. Bees are attracted to sweet foods.
- Loud noise, engine vibration and waving arms can provoke an attack.
- If attacked, cover your face and run to the nearest shelter or vehicle.
- Notify a co-worker immediately or call 911 if you have symptoms of anaphylactic shock.
- Remove bee stingers right away by scraping horizontally with a knife or fingernail.
- Never squeeze the stinger. You may inject venom into your skin.
- Wash the area with soap and water to avoid infection.
- Ice packs, over-the-counter steroid creams, sting-kill swabs, antihistamine ointments or tablets can decrease swelling and pain.
- If you're allergic to stings, wear a medical-alert bracelet.
- Multiple stings can cause allergic reactions.
- Once you've had an allergic reaction, you're more likely to have more in the future. Always carry an emergency self-treatment kit. If you're stung, it can reduce symptoms until you can get to a hospital.

Fire Ants

When colonies of fire ants are disturbed, they may swarm over the victim and inflict as many as 5,000 stings in a few seconds. And just because they're small doesn't mean they aren't dangerous. Fire-ant venom is toxic and can kill.

- Fire ants live under buildings, in mounds, in fields, and in ditches.
- They also nest in utility boxes, causing power outages and fires.
- Make sure you check electrical boxes regularly.
- Keep piles of dirt away from buildings.
- If you find any nests, call an exterminator. Don't try to remove them yourself.
- For a non-allergic person bitten a few times by fire ants, the stings can cause severe burning pain and blisters.
- If you're bitten by fire ants, ask a co-worker to observe your symptoms.
- Victims who are allergic to fire-ant toxin can suffer anaphylactic shock.
- If you experience difficulty breathing or swallowing, call 911 immediately.

Ticks

Ticks can give you many diseases. The most common are Lyme Disease and Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. Ticks that carry Lyme Disease have been found on deer, mice, black bears, opossums, raccoons, skunks, woodchucks, gray squirrels, and red foxes. Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever occurs across the country, but most often on the Atlantic seaboard and in the southeast and south-central states.

- A bacteria carried by deer ticks causes Lyme Disease.
- Lyme Disease can cause crippling nervous system and joint problems.
- Years after exposure, you can suffer from heart abnormalities and other symptoms.
- Left untreated, Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever can cause flu-like symptoms, mental confusion, gangrene—even death.
- Check your body for ticks after working in wooded areas.
- If you find a tick on your body, remove it with a pair of fine-tipped tweezers. Don't use your hands.
- Don't twist the tick's body. Pull the tick straight out. If you don't, the head can break off.
- Don't use a lit match or hot pin to remove the tick. In addition to burning yourself, you can absorb bacteria or virus by breathing the smoke.
- Clean the area immediately with soap and water or alcohol.
- See a doctor immediately if you suspect a problem. Without early treatment, tick bites can cause chronic fatigue, arthritis and heart abnormalities.
- If you're working in areas that you suspect contain ticks, ask your supervisor about getting a Lyme Disease vaccine.

Spiders

The black widow spider has venom that is 15 times more poisonous than rattlesnake venom. The bite of the brown recluse spider can damage body tissues.

- Watch for signs of spiders when working under houses and in dark basements or attics.
- Wear heavy-duty gloves when moving piles of brush or wood.
- If you notice a tingling feeling, sudden nausea or stomach pain, you may have been bitten by a spider. See a doctor immediately.

- If you're bitten by a spider, you may not feel it right away. The only sign may be two tiny red dots and a swollen area.

- If you're bitten by a black widow spider, your stomach muscles may become rigid. Abdominal pain and cramps may last up to 48 hours.

Caterpillars

Some varieties of the furry little creatures that appear in the spring can be life-threatening.

- Hidden in their coats are short, hollow spines loaded with poison.
- When they touch you, the spines break and poison flows onto your skin.
- Stay on the lookout for caterpillars. Most poisonings result from accidental contact.
- If necessary, spray infested vegetation with EPA-approved pesticide.
- Contact with a poisonous caterpillar will cause immediate burning pain, local numbness and swelling.
- Try to remove all imbedded hairs by applying adhesive tape to pull them from your skin.
- Wash the area with soap and water.
- If you experience nausea, vomiting, high fever, and breathing difficulty, you have signs of anaphylactic shock. Get help immediately.

Snakes

Pit vipers, including rattlesnakes, cottonmouths (aka water moccasins), and copperheads are the most common poisonous snakes. The second most common are coral snakes.


- Rattlesnakes and copperheads have arrow-shaped heads and cat-like eyes.
- Rattlesnakes have horny buttons called rattles at the end of their tails.
- Copperheads have light and dark bands around their bodies. (Note: They also give off a cucumber-like odor.—Ed.)
- Cottonmouths have hourglass markings and a mouth, when opened, as white as cotton.
- Coral snakes have red, white or yellow and black bands around their bodies.
- Leave snakes alone. Most people are bitten trying to kill them or to get a better look.
- Watch out for snakes under houses, under piles of wood or stone, and in tall grass.
- Don't pick up brush or rocks before turning them over with a stick.
- If a snake bite contains venom, swelling occurs in 10 minutes.

- Fingers and toes become numb, and you may notice a metallic taste in your mouth.

- You also may feel sleepy and have difficulty swallowing or forming words.
- Avoid running, and try not to panic. Use a belt or a rope as a constricting device to minimize the flow of poison.
- Don't raise the bite area. Keep the area lower than your heart.
- Don't try to remove the venom with your mouth. Bacteria in your mouth can cause infection. Also, venom may enter through broken skin or gums.

Rodents and Hantaviruses

If you open up cabins and sheds closed during the winter, or clean outbuildings for farm and construction equipment, you could be exposed to hantaviruses. Construction and utility workers could be exposed if they work in crawl spaces under houses or in vacant buildings that might have a rodent infestation.

- Hantaviruses cause hantavirus pulmonary syndrome and hemorrhagic fever with renal syndrome. Both can kill you.
- When fresh rodent urine, droppings, saliva or nesting material is kicked up or swept, you can breathe in the virus.
- To prevent exposure in rodent-infested areas, wear latex or vinyl gloves and a half-face air-purifying respirator equipped with HEPA filters.
- Drench rodent urine, droppings and nesting material with a disinfectant solution of 1:10 bleach-to-water mix.
- Once contaminated materials are completely wet, you can pick them up with a damp towel.
- When debris is cleared, mop or sponge down the area with disinfectant solution.
- Spray dead rodents with disinfectant and double-bag with debris, according to local or state health department recommendations.
- Disinfect gloves before you remove them. Wash hands with soap and warm water immediately.
- If you develop a fever, deep muscle aches, and severe shortness of breath after working around rodents, see a doctor immediately. 

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