



Guide to Poisonous Plants:

Understanding, Preventing, &
Treating Exposure in the Workplace



Introduction

Poison Ivy, Oak, and Sumac are plants that contain urushiol oil, which can cause a painful and itchy rash when it comes in contact with skin. This rash can be debilitating and last for several weeks, making it a major concern for those who work outdoors, including arborists, landscapers, construction, and forest service workers. The impact of this rash is not only physical but can also result in loss of productivity, as the affected individuals need to take time off work to recover. According to the US Forest Services, dermatitis from *Toxicodendron* resulted in 10% of lost time due to injury related to rash.

Additionally, in areas with dense forestry, such as California, Oregon, and Washington, one third of firefighters are disabled with dermatitis from poison ivy and related species each fire season. The cost of treatment accounted for 1% of the budget of yearly workers' compensation in California, for which the total was 11.4 billion dollars in 2014.

Outdoor workplaces pose a high risk of exposure to poisonous plants, including Poison Ivy Oak and Sumac, and other invasive species such as hogweed and parsnip. These reactions can range from mild to serious or deadly and can have a significant impact on the worker's ability to perform their duties. Therefore, it is crucial for employers to take proactive measures to prevent exposure to poison ivy in the workplace.



What are Poisonous Plants?

Poisonous plants are a common workplace hazard that can cause a range of skin reactions and illnesses. Whether you work in construction, landscaping, or any other outdoor profession, it is important to be aware of the types of poisonous plants that can be found in your work environment.



1 OAK

Poison oak leaves have three leaflets like poison ivy but with rounded tips. The undersides of the leaves are fuzzy and lighter in color than the top. Poison oak typically grows as a shrub in the Eastern and Southern U.S. The shrub sometimes has white or yellow berries.



2 IVY

Poison ivy leaves vary greatly in their shape, color and texture. Some leaves have smooth edges, while others have a jagged, tooth-like appearance. In the fall, the leaves may turn yellow, orange or red. Poison ivy can produce small, greenish flowers and green or off-white berries.



3 SUMAC

Poison sumac is a small slender tree, or multi-stemmed shrub, with grey bark and large compound leaves with 7-13 leaflets. The leaflets are not toothed and are smooth without hair. The central leaf stem may be reddish. The leaves are often held upward and appear somewhat stiff.

Types of Reactions

Contact with poisonous plants can cause a range of skin reactions, influenced by a person's immune system, the type of plant, and the level of exposure. Understanding these reactions is important for prevention and safety:

Mechanical dermatitis – Skin injuries from thorns, spines, or plant hairs that may lead to secondary infections.

Irritant dermatitis – Direct irritation from plant chemicals, such as wild parsnip sap in sunlight.

Phytophotodermatitis – The most common type of irritant reaction, caused when plant phototoxins on the skin react with sunlight.

Allergic contact dermatitis – A more severe immune response triggered by repeat exposure to allergens like urushiol.

Recognizing and avoiding poisonous plants is essential to protecting workers from painful skin conditions and potential illness.

Identifying Poisonous Plants

Poison ivy, oak, and sumac are plants that can cause skin irritation and rashes in most people who come into contact with them. Identifying these plants is crucial in preventing exposure and potential health risks. Each plant has unique characteristics that can help distinguish it from other plants.



POISON IVY

- Vine that climbs up trees or grows as a shrub
- Three leaflets with pointed tips
- Glossy green leaves in summer, turn red, yellow, or orange in fall
- Leaves are 3-4 inches long and 2-3 inches wide
- Stem may have brown or black hairs
- Small, greenish-white flowers and white or green berries
- Found across North America, except in CA, AK, and HI
- Favors disturbed ground and rarely grows above 5,000 ft or in deserts
- Two types: Eastern and Western Poison Ivy



POISON OAK

- Shrub that grows up to 6 feet tall
- Three leaflets shaped like oak leaves
- Green leaves in summer, turn red or brown in fall
- Leaves may have rounded or pointed tips
- Stem may be red or brown
- Small, white or green flowers and green or white berries
- Less common than poison ivy
- Found in woodlands and Douglas fir forests, as well as disturbed ground
- Atlantic poison oak found along Atlantic coast, Pacific poison oak found along Pacific coast



POISON SUMAC

- Tall shrub or small tree that can grow up to 25 feet tall
- Leaves arranged in pairs, with one leaf at the end
- Oval-shaped leaves, pointed at the tip, smooth edge
- Green leaves in summer, turn red or yellow in fall
- Smooth, grayish-brown stem
- Small, greenish-white flowers and whitish or pale yellow berries
- Long, drooping clusters of small green or white berries
- Typically found in areas with standing water
- Significant hazard for those working in or around these areas



Preventing Poisonous Plant Exposure at Work

Wear protective clothing – long sleeves, pants, and gloves
Stay on trails – avoid areas where plants commonly grow
Educate yourself - identify poison ivy, oak, and sumac
Be season-aware – plants are most active in summer and fall
Check surroundings before touching plants or objects
Avoid indirect contact – wash tools, gear, and pets
Clean up quickly – wash skin and clothes with soap or Ivy Cleanse
Burn safely – use a NIOSH-approved respirator per OSHA standards

First Aid and Emergency Situations

If you suspect that you have come into contact with poison ivy, it is essential to take prompt action to prevent or minimize the severity of the rash.



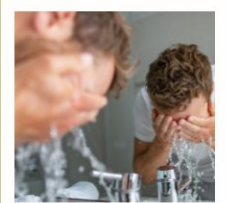
Wash the area with I.C. Ivy Cleanse and cool water

I.C. Ivy Cleanse is formulated to remove urushiol oil. Use cool water, not hot: cool water helps rinse urushiol away, and hot water can make it harder to remove and can increase irritation.



Remove contaminated clothing

Urushiol oil can remain on clothing, shoes, and accessories, so it is important to remove them immediately and wash them separately to prevent further spread



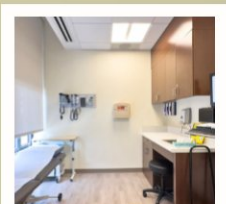
Rinse eyes and mucous membranes with water

In case urushiol oil comes into contact with eyes or other sensitive areas, rinse them immediately with water. If symptoms persist, seek medical attention



Avoid scratching

Scratching can worsen the symptoms and lead to potential infection. Instead, apply a cool compress, calamine lotion, or hydrocortisone cream to relieve itching and discomfort



Seek medical attention for severe reactions or Call 911

In case of widespread rash, difficulty breathing, swelling of the throat and face, or a choking feeling, seek medical attention immediately or go to the nearest emergency room immediately



Products for Prevention, Removal, and Treatment

While the best way to avoid the reaction is to steer clear of these plants, accidental exposure can happen. Fortunately, there are several products available that can help prevent, remove, and treat poison ivy exposure.

Prevention

There are three ways to prevent poison ivy: avoid it altogether, wear clothing to shield your skin from it, or apply a barrier skin protectant such as I.C. Ivy Block before exposure. Note that workers should continue to follow precautions when returning outdoors by properly washing their skin, garments, and tools.

Barrier creams: Provide temporary protection by creating a protective layer that keeps urushiol oil from contacting the skin. Apply them thoroughly to exposed areas; they are not foolproof and may not protect against all exposure. I.C. Ivy Block is a pre-contact skin protectant: its bentonite clay barrier absorbs urushiol oil before it reaches skin, and its label actives are zinc acetate 0.1% and dimethicone 3.0%.

Protective clothing and gloves: Made from synthetic materials such as nylon, polyester, and spandex and designed to protect against poison ivy, oak, and sumac. They offer better protection than natural fibers like cotton. Avoid touching the outside of the clothing, as it may be contaminated with urushiol.



Removal

Urushiol oil from poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac plants can cause a persistent allergic reaction on the skin, so it's crucial to remove it as soon as possible to prevent further irritation.

Soap and water: The most effective way to remove urushiol from the skin is by washing with soap and cool water. Surfactants break down urushiol oil so it rinses off the skin.

Rubbing alcohol: Rubbing alcohol can help dissolve urushiol oil, but it should only be used on unbroken skin as it can be painful and worsen symptoms by removing the protective barrier of the skin.

Specialized poison ivy cleansers: There are specialized poison ivy cleansers that are formulated specifically to remove urushiol oil from the skin, clothing, and other surfaces. They contain surfactants and other ingredients that dissolve the oil. I.C. Ivy Cleanse is a recommended product that contains specialized detergents to get rid of urushiol.

Exfoliants: Pumice or oatmeal can be added to soap to create an exfoliant that can physically scrub away urushiol oil from the skin. Care should be taken not to scrub too hard, as this can further irritate the skin and worsen the rash.



Treatment

Poison Ivy Relief Creams and Ointments are topical products designed to relieve the itching, redness, and discomfort associated with poison ivy, oak, or sumac rash. These products typically contain ingredients which help to reduce inflammation, itching, and oozing of the skin.

Calamine is a soothing and cooling ingredient that helps to relieve itching and irritation, while also providing a protective barrier over the affected area.

Hydrocortisone is a mild steroid that helps to reduce inflammation and itching of the skin, but should be used sparingly and only for a short period of time.

Diphenhydramine is an antihistamine that can help to reduce itching and swelling, but can also cause drowsiness and should not be used for extended periods of time.

Aloe vera can help to soothe and moisturize the skin, while pramoxine provides a numbing effect to relieve itching and discomfort.

Zinc Acetate is an astringent that dries the oozing and weeping of poison ivy, oak and sumac.

These products can provide temporary relief of symptoms, but they do not cure the rash or prevent future outbreaks. If you have a severe or persistent rash, or if you develop a fever or other symptoms, seek medical attention immediately.



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