

Stay on the Prowl for Poisonous Plants

As the sun beats down and temperatures rise, poisonous plants may be the last thing on your mind. But if you work outside, they are as real a threat as sun and heat.

Can you identify ivy?

In much of North America, the most common hazardous plant is poison ivy. It comes in three forms: a weed mixed in among grasses, a small bush in a fencerow or a climbing vine on a tree.

Poison ivy is fairly easy to spot. Each dark green stem has three shiny oval-shaped leaflets, with white flowers in late summer and white berries in early fall. Also in the fall, the leaves turn dark red or purple. Even in winter, despite its brown and brittle appearance, poison ivy still contains uroshiol, the oil that results in a itchy rash.

You need not even contact a damaged plant to be exposed to uroshiol. It sticks to leather, animal fur, clothing and gardening instruments. Even when it's being destroyed by fire, poison ivy can send the oil up in smoke, posing a threat to your eyes, mouth and lungs.

Watch for a rash of symptoms

If you come into contact with poison ivy, wash with soapy water as soon as possible. It takes a while for the oil to set in, so if you wash quickly enough, you might be able to prevent a reaction. If you are sensitive to poison ivy, a red itchy rash will appear within 12 to 48 hours. Blistering and severe itching may follow. The blisters should crust over and heal in 10 to 14 days.

Get to know villains

If you work outdoors, you may run across more than the common ivy. Here are poisonous plants to watch for:

Poison oak. A shrub or vine that resembles ivy; it has three to five leaflets and yellowish berries in the fall. It is very common in wooded areas.

Poison sumac. A larger shrub (4 to 6 feet high) with 7 to 13 leaflets. Similar to poison ivy, it produces white berries and its leaves turn orange/red in the fall. You will usually find it in damp areas like bogs and swamps or roadside ditches where water collects.

Ragweed. The culprit behind hay fever can incite symptoms such as swollen skin, watery eyes and a runny nose. This plant displays yellow-green flowers in the summer and fall and can grow up to 8 feet tall.

Stinging nettles. This low-growing plant with heart-shaped leaves and stems covered with tiny hair-like needles is common in wooded areas. Its sting is followed by burning, itching and/or a straight line of small blisters.

If you do come in contact with a poisonous plant, be careful not to touch exposed skin with infected clothing. Take the infected clothes off carefully to make sure you do not touch your skin with them. Launder these clothes separately, and run a wash cycle to rinse the washer container before laundering other clothing.

Prevention is key

Education and prevention are the best ways to steer clear of poisonous plants. Familiarize yourself with the plants of your region, dress to keep uroshiol off your skin and out of your airways, and you

will stay reaction-free at work and play.3

National Safety Council

Call before you dig

Each year significant damage is done to underground utilities from unauthorized digging projects that subject people and property to tremendous risk. May 1, 2007 marked the dawning of a new era for underground damage prevention. The 62 One Call Centers nationwide are now reachable by dialing the three digits 8-1-1.

This call should be made before attempting any digging project. This includes something as small as planting a tree or as large as a home addition.

Digging accidents can be prevented with a call to the local One Call Center (811), a service that contacts appropriate utility companies which mark the approximate locations of underground utility lines.

Any questions or requests for free loss control services should be directed to Marty Kalbach, Loss Control Manager, at 609-386-6060 extension 3024.3

*By Marty Kalbach
NJSBAIG Loss Control Manager*

WeTip Planning for Next School Year

Attention SRO's

WeTip is a free service available to all NJSBAIG members. The program consists of a 24 hour/day, 7 day/week phone line available to receive information regarding criminal activity in your community. The service is totally anonymous and provides rewards to tipsters for supplying information leading to the successful adjudication of criminals.

Now is the time to plan your District's WeTip program for the 2008/2009 year. The initial communication and on-going reminders of its existence are important to it's success.

Anyone interested in more information may contact their Member Services Representative or Marty Kalbach at 609-386-6060 extension 3024.3

Remove Electrical Hazards in the Classroom

The improper use of electrical appliances can cause both physical injury and property damage. Even minor electrical shocks can be scary, very dangerous and can lead to bigger problems if not immediately addressed. Paper overload, often found in our classrooms and offices, is just an electrical spark away from a fire.

Be aware of these common electrical hazards seen in schools:

- Damaged cords and outlets
- Extension cords “chained” together
- Outlets covered by paper
- Overloaded outlets and power strips
- Electrical ground connections removed from plugs
- Improperly disconnected computers
- Electrical cords and appliances near sinks and other water sources
- Cords under carpeting or rugs
- Electrical heaters under desks or near flammable materials.

Precautions to take:

- Take your time. Don't hurry a job without taking the proper precautions when working with electricity.
- Appliances such as refrigerators and microwaves should be plugged directly into outlets—**never** into power strips or extensions cords.
- All damaged cords and outlets should be reported to the appropriate site staff. Don't use until they are repaired or replaced.
- Don't let cords hang from equipment, such as mounted TVs. Properly secure cords to walls.
- Never modify or remove equipment guards. They protect users from energized equipment parts.
- Know the location of the utility shut-off. Shut-off switches should be appropriately marked for easy recognition.
- Provide 36 inches of space in front of electrical panels for easy access. Do not cover panels with posters or other decorations.
- Be careful when moving any machinery with electrical cords.³

Overheated Clothes Dryers Can Cause Fires

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission estimates that annually there are 15,500 fires, 10 deaths, and 310 injuries associated with clothes dryers. Some of these fires may occur when lint builds up in the filter or in the exhaust duct. Under certain conditions, when lint blocks the flow of air, excessive heat build-up may cause a fire in some dryers. To prevent fires:

- Clean the lint filter after each load of clothes. While the dryer is operating, check the outside exhaust to make sure exhaust air is escaping normally. If the dryer is hotter than normal, this may be a sign that the dryer's temperature control thermostat needs servicing.

- Check the exhaust duct more often if you have a plastic, flexible duct. This type of duct is more apt to trap lint than ducting without ridges.

- Closely follow manufacturer's instructions for new installations. Most manufacturers that get their clothes dryers approved by Underwriters Laboratories specify the use of metal exhaust duct.³