

Seasonal Safety



Source: www.TurfMagazine.com

4 summertime hazards and what to do about them



Be sure that employees drink enough water so they don't get thirsty when the weather is hot and humid, which can help prevent heat-related illnesses.
PHOTO BY GARRETT BURNETT.

While summer is prime time for landscapers, it also introduces a number of seasonal hazards. Outdoor work exposes contractors to extreme heat and ultraviolet radiation, as well as the risk of contact with venomous animals and poisonous plants. Taking the right precautions, however, can keep you and your employees safe and healthy.

1 Heat stress

The most common ailment in hot environments is heat rash. It appears as itchy red bumps or patches, usually on the neck and the insides of the elbows. Heat rash indicates that sweat isn't evaporating properly and that it's time to dry off and cool down. Heat cramps arise when the labor of landscaping is combined with dehydration. To treat these muscle pains, cool off and drink something that will replenish your fluids, salt levels and electrolytes. The cramps should subside within the hour. Heat cramps can also be a symptom of heat exhaustion, which makes you dizzy, nauseated and fatigued. Your skin will be clammy, and you may begin sweating heavily. This is your body's last-ditch effort to avoid heat stroke, the most serious threat. When your body cannot regulate its temperature, you may experience blinding headaches, confusion, hallucinations, an inability to sweat, slurred speech or chills despite running a temperature higher than 100 degrees. Heat stroke is life-threatening and requires immediate medical attention. After calling 911, the top priority is cooling the body down. Someone suffering from heat stroke needs to be promptly moved to a cool, shaded area, soaked with water and fanned.

Heat-related illnesses are best prevented from the outset. Schedule your company's heaviest work for the coolest parts of the day and breaks for the hottest parts. Rotate work on the most physically demanding projects. Try to find shade throughout the day by working on the western side of the site as the sun rises and on the eastern side as the sun sets, and wear loose-fitting clothing that breathes well. Take more breaks on hotter or more humid days, and take time to acclimatize to rising temperatures. Make sure you and your employees drink enough that you don't get thirsty (1 cup every 15 to 30 minutes), and avoid caffeine, alcohol and lots of sugar.

2 Poisonous plants

Poison ivy, poison oak and poison sumac form the triple crown of menacing plants. The first two are prevalent across the country, and the third is abundant east of the Mississippi and in Texas. Each of these plants produces sap oil called urushiol, which causes a painful allergic reaction. A rash may form, and can swell or form into blisters.

Learn to identify local varieties of these plants so you can avoid them. Protect yourself from their sap oil by wearing long sleeves, long pants, boots and gloves. Wash clothes and tools well if they've come in contact with poison ivy, oak or sumac, and consider using a barrier skin cream, such as a lotion containing bentoquatam. Do not burn these plants since inhaling their smoke can cause life-threatening allergic reactions.

If you or an employee comes in contact with one of the poisonous trio, rinse skin immediately with rubbing alcohol or degreasing soap (dishwashing soap) and rinse with lots of water, making sure to scrub under fingernails. Hydrocortisone cream, calamine lotion or simple wet compresses will reduce itching and blistering.

3 Ultraviolet radiation

Throughout the extended daylight hours of the summer, the sun hits the earth with three types of ultraviolet rays: UVA, UVB and UVC. The atmosphere absorbs UVC rays, so only UVA and UVB reach us. Sunblock and smart clothing choices are keys to stopping sunburns and lessening the likelihood of skin cancer. A sunblock's SPF rating indicates how much longer you can stay in the sun without getting burned by UVB rays than you would without the sunblock. For example, an SPF of 15 will protect your skin 15 times longer than if you used nothing at all. Because SPF only applies to UVB rays, look for a sunblock with UVA blocking chemicals such as Mexoryl, Parsol 1789, titanium dioxide, zinc oxide or avobenzone.

Sunscreen performance is affected by wind, humidity and perspiration, and should be reapplied at least every two hours. Some sunscreens lose their efficiency when used with insect repellent. Wear a hat and sunglasses, and if you have a history of skin cancer, be sure to wear dark clothing with a tight weave, which blocks UV rays more effectively than light-colored, loosely woven clothing.



Ticks are most active during the summer and can spread a variety of diseases. Have employees check skin, hair and clothes at the end of each day for ticks
PHOTO BY JAMES GATHANY, CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL.

4 Venomous or disease-spreading animals

Nature offers an abundance of irritating, venomous and disease-spreading animals. Be on guard near their preferred hiding places. Woods, bushes, high grass and leaf litter tend to house ticks, spiders and snakes. Additionally, snakes and spiders take refuge in piles of brick, rock or firewood. Wasps hang around food-based garbage, bees (not surprisingly) congregate near flowering plants, and black widows have been known to loiter in outdoor toilets for flies. Inspect boots and tools for bugs, and store unused apparel and equipment in tightly closed plastic bags. Avoid bites by paying attention to your surroundings and wearing a long-sleeved shirt, long pants, socks, boots, leather gloves and a hat. Use insect repellent containing 20 percent DEET.

Ticks, which are most active throughout the summer, spread Lyme disease, Rocky Mountain spotted fever and a variety of other nasty illnesses by biting their victims. Tick-borne diseases usually cause aches, fevers and joint pain. Have employees check skin, hair and clothes for ticks every day. If one is found, squeeze it with fine-tipped tweezers as close to the skin as possible and pull it away with a steady motion. For added protection, an insecticide called Permethrin can be used to treat clothing and will last through several washings.

Rattlesnakes, copperheads, cottonmouths (water moccasins) and coral snakes form the pantheon of venomous snakes in the United States. Snake bites are common, but rarely fatal. If bitten, call for emergency medical help. Wash the bite with soap and water, then stay calm and still to help slow the spread of venom.

Black widows, hobo spiders and brown recluses are not usually aggressive, biting only when threatened or disturbed. A bite may cause an initial stinging sensation, but often goes unnoticed until the area becomes discolored, gets itchy or forms a blister. The venom can cause pain, muscle cramps, headaches, nausea and fevers. If bitten, wash the bite with soap and water, ice it to reduce swelling, and seek professional medical attention.

Recommendations

- Be smart – Find out what you're most likely to encounter in your environment. Knowing the threats will help you avoid trouble.
- Watch out for each other – Monitor your own physical condition, but also keep an eye out for your co-workers. Someone else's tick is always easier to spot.
- Brush up on your first aid – Learn the symptoms of heat-related illness, bites and exposure to poisonous plants. If you don't prevent a problem, you can at least treat it.

A little extra attention and caution will help you stay safe and healthy all

summer long.

Garrett Burnett is a writer at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health in Cincinnati, Ohio.