

Everyday Safety

Tailgate Talks

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Poisonous Plant Safety

There are several species of poisonous plants that you or your workers may encounter in the field throughout the United States. It is important for the health and safety of employees to know how to identify poisonous plants, prevent exposure, and treat for contact. The following are some poisonous plants you may encounter when engaging in outdoor construction operations:

POISON IVY

Poison ivy is native to North America, and present statewide in New York. It is extremely common, especially when it grows as a ground cover. Thin woody stems run along the ground and become rooted in. Leaves grow on short slender upright shoots, often mixed in with grass. Poison ivy is especially common along edges of wooded areas, paths, and meadows. It prefers rich soils, good moisture and the partial shade of forest edges, but seems to be able to grow almost anywhere except on very dry hot sites. It will however grow well on hot dry limestone outcrops. It grows in vines and small low lying shrubs and has three distinct leaves. The leaves change color: bright red in the spring, green in the summer, reddish/orange/yellow in the fall.



All parts of the plant contain a resinous oil called urushiol (you-ROO-she-all), which is a potent allergen. Individuals differ in sensitivity. Usually a person has to be exposed at least once previously to become sensitized and develop an allergic reaction. The typical skin reaction of an intensely itchy rash appears up to 24 hours after exposure. In some people, the rash progresses to severe blistering and may require steroid treatment.

Hanover Testing Labs



Treatment

Wash your hands with Poison Ivy Soap (Tachnu) and COLD Water. After rash has broken out wash your body in hottest water possible to relieve itching for a few hours. There are a variety of cream OTC as well that may help.

WILD PARSNIP

Wild parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*) is an invasive plant from Europe and Asia that has become naturalized in North America. It is well suited for colonizing disturbed areas but can also be found in open fields and lawns. Wild parsnip sap can cause painful, localized burning and blistering of the skin.

Wild parsnip can be found growing in a broad range of habitats, especially along roadsides, in fields and in pastures. It is common in the United States and Canada and is widespread in New York.

Wild parsnip sap contains chemicals called furanocoumarins which can make skin more vulnerable to ultraviolet light. Brushing against or breaking the plant releases sap that, combined with sunlight, can cause a severe burn within 24 to 48 hours. This reaction, known as phytophotodermatitis, can also cause discoloration of the skin and increased sensitivity to sunlight that may last for years.



Signs of Exposure:

- Mild cases: skin reddens and feels sunburned
- Severe Cases: Skin reddens then blisters rise and the skin can feel scalded
- Parsnip burns often appear as streaks and long spots. It is difficult to diagnose and looks a lot like poison ivy.

Treatment

Relieve the symptoms by covering the affected area with a cool, wet cloth. Keep blisters from breaking. Keep the area clean and apply antibiotic cream.

GIANT HOGWEED

Giant hogweed (*Heracleum mantegazzianum*) is a VERY LARGE, invasive plant that can cause painful burns and permanent scarring. Brushing against or breaking the plant releases sap that, combined with sunlight and moisture, can cause a severe burn within 24 to 48 hours. Giant hogweed is a Federally listed noxious weed and NYS law prohibits its possession with the intent to sell, import, purchase, transport, introduce or propagate.



Giant Hogweed is an invasive species that falls under the NYSDEC Giant Hogweed Control Program and should be reported. To report a sighting of Giant Hogweed Email DEC at ghogweed@dec.ny.gov or call the Giant Hogweed Information Line: 1-845-256-3111. Provide photos, detailed directions to the plant infestation (GPS coordinates and street address a plus) and estimate the number of plants.

Signs of Exposure:

- Painful blisters that form within 48 hours and become dark and pigmented
- Scars that last up to six years, though typically only last a few months
- Long-term sensitivity to sunlight is common



Treatment

- Wash the affected area thoroughly with soap and COLD water as soon as possible
- Keep exposed area away from sunlight for 48 hours
- If a reaction occurs, topical steroids applied early can reduce the severity of the reaction and ease discomfort
- If sap goes in eyes, rinse them with water and wear sunglasses
- If a reaction has occurred, the area of skin may be sensitive to sunlight for a few years and you may want to apply sun block or keep the affected area covered from the sun when possible
- See a physician if you have a reaction or any questions

ACTION ITEMS

- Wear Long Sleeves, long pants, boots, gloves, and even a respiratory mask at times
- Do not burn brush piles that may contain poison Ivy or Wild Parsnip. Inhaling smoke from burning poisonous plants can cause severe allergic respiratory problems
- Use barrier skin creams, such as lotion containing benoquatam
- Be mindful of your surroundings.

Resources and References:

NYSDEC Harmful Plants Webpage

<https://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/105282.html>

NYSDEC Giant Hogweed Resource Webpage

<https://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/39809.html>

NYSDOT Dangerous Roadside Plants Webpage

<https://www.dot.ny.gov/dangerous-plants>

