



North Carolina Wing Weekly Safety Blast

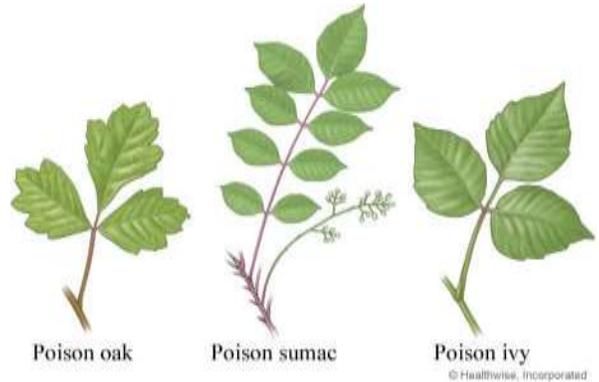


2018 - Topic #25 – Poisonous Plant Awareness

Reason for this Blast:

Many types of plants cause an allergic reaction when ingested, touched or inhaled as smoke from burning dried matter. The most common exposures are to urushiol, the sap oil contained in poison ivy, poison oak and poison sumac. These plants are poisonous year round.

Recognition:



➤ **Poison Ivy:**

- ✓ Poison ivy is found everywhere in the United States except Alaska and Hawaii. It is most common in the eastern and Midwestern states. It is less common outside the United States, but still found on every continent.
- ✓ Usually has three broad, spoon-shaped leaves or leaflets, but it can have more. The phrase, "Leaves of three? Let it be." may help you remember what poison ivy looks like.
- ✓ Grows as a climbing vine or a low, spreading vine that sprawls through grass (more common in eastern states) or as a shrub (more common in northern states, Canada, and the Great Lakes region).
- ✓ Often grows along rivers, lake fronts, and ocean beaches.
- ✓ Has bright red leaves and white or cream berries in the autumn.

➤ **Poison Oak:**

- ✓ Poison oak is most common in the western United States, although it is also found in eastern states. It rarely is found in Midwestern states.
- ✓ Has leaves that look like oak leaves, usually three leaflets but sometimes up to seven on each leaf group.
- ✓ Grows as a vine or a shrub.

➤ **Poison Sumac:**

- ✓ Much less common than poison ivy or poison oak. It is found in wooded, swampy areas, such as Florida and parts of other southeastern states. It is also found in wet, wooded areas in the northern United States.
- ✓ Has 7 to 13 leaflets on each leaf stem. The leaves have smooth edges and pointed tips.
- ✓ Grows as a shrub or small tree.



North Carolina Wing Weekly Safety Blast



Exposure Symptoms:

A red skin rash with bumps or blisters typically erupts within a few days of contact with sap oil. The fluid in blisters is not contagious. Itchiness, swelling and broad spreading of the rash can cause extreme discomfort and make it difficult to work. Inhalation can cause severe lung irritation.

Treatment:

Following inhalation, emergency care is required for difficulty breathing. A medical evaluation should be immediately sought for swelling and rash on the face or genitals, and for anyone who has had a severe reaction in the past.

The following are first-aid recommendations for milder cases:

- Apply a wet compress, calamine lotion or non-prescription hydrocortisone cream to the skin to reduce itching and blistering. Some people find an oatmeal bath is soothing.
- An over-the-counter antihistamine may help relieve itching. However, it is important to follow instructions and be certain it will not cause drowsiness or otherwise affect the ability to work safely. If unsure about medication effects, ask a clinician or pharmacist.

Most rashes will heal in five to 12 days, but in some cases can last for weeks.

Prevention:

1. Be aware of your surroundings. Know the plants
2. Wear long sleeves and pants when working in dense vegetation. Accidental contact is usually the source of irritation.
3. Wear gloves and eye protection if there is a possibility of unintentional contact.
4. Do not wipe off exposed skin with contaminated clothing after possible exposure. This is certain to cause a reaction to the oil.
5. Immediately flush the area with fresh water if accidentally exposed to the oil. This can prevent a reaction if done quickly enough.

MAIN DISCUSSION POINT OF THIS SAFETY BLAST

When out exploring our environment or responding as part of a ground team, be aware of your surroundings, to include the vegetation you may encounter. The best way to avoid exposure to these plants is to be aware of what they look like and avoid contact.