



## DISCUSSION TOPIC: POISON IVY, POISON OAK, AND POISON SUMAC

Poison Ivy, Oak, and Sumac are the three most common poisonous plants that somebody working outside will encounter. All three have common health effects but are different in appearance. They can also differ based on the region you are located in. This oil is present in the plant throughout the year, but a skin reaction is most common in spring or early summer when the leaves are tender. Poison ivy's cousins – poison oak, which grows as high as six feet in the West, and poison sumac, which grows mainly in swampy woods or shrub swamps in the southeastern parts of Canada.

Approximately 85% of Canadians will react to poison ivy, oak, or sumac. Urushiol is a very strong allergen, it is said that a quarter ounce of the oil can give the whole Earth's population a rash. A quick contact with a plant is enough to make a person break out in a rash. The reaction can take up to a few days to appear, typically involves redness and itching that quickly develops into small blisters. Sometimes a secondary infection develops.

### AVOIDING EXPOSURE

It's very easy to mistake poison ivy for a beautiful vine growing up the side of a brick wall. Obviously, those workers in the landscaping industry need to be particularly careful, but anyone working outdoors could potentially come in contact with poisonous plants without realizing it. How to recognize poison ivy, oak and sumac as well as what to do if you or your clothes come in contact with it, should be the topic of a safety meeting at least once a year. A good time to have this safety meeting is in the Spring or Summer when these plants are prevalent. During the safety huddle on this topic, make sure the following points are emphasized.

- Employees should wear long pants, long sleeves, closed-toe shoes, and gloves for protection when working in wooded areas.
- Avoid direct contact and indirect contact with these plants. Don't touch any tools or clothing that has been contaminated by the oil or sap of the plant.
- Wear proper personal protective equipment (PPE) when working outdoors and in areas where contact with harmful plants is possible. Long pants, shirts with long sleeves, gloves and work boots can prevent accident contact with poisonous plants.
- Wash tools and clothes with warm soapy water to reduce the spreading of the harmful oil.
- Never burn plants or brush piles that may contain poison ivy, poison oak, or poison sumac.
- Inhaling the smoke from burning these plants or inhaling small particles from cutting or chopping them can cause severe lung reactions.
- Wash your skin with soap and water if you come in contact with a poisonous plant.
- If you do have a reaction to the harmful plant, avoid scratching and bursting the blisters which can lead to infection.

# TOOLBOX TALK



## WHAT TO DO IF EXPOSED

Because urushiol can penetrate the skin within minutes, do not waste time if exposed. The faster the victim's skin is cleansed, the greater the chance of removing the urushiol before it penetrates the skin. Cleansing may not stop the initial outbreak of the rash if more than ten minutes has passed, but it can help prevent the rash from spreading.

If exposed to poison ivy, oak or sumac, stay indoors (if possible) until the following steps are completed. Wear gloves or cover hands while completing the steps and then discard the hand covering.

- Cleanse exposed skin with generous amounts of isopropyl (rubbing) alcohol immediately. Do not return to the woods or yard the same day. Alcohol removes your skin's protection along with the urushiol, and any new contact will cause the urushiol to penetrate twice as fast
- Take a shower with soap and warm water. Do not use soap before this point because soap could pick up some of the urushiol from the surface of the skin and move it around.

**Poison Ivy: Will always have three leaves, never any less or more. Poison Ivy will never have thorns.**

**Poison Oak: Will always have three leaves, never any less or more. Poison Oak will never have thorns. Similar to Poison Ivy, but its wider and more rounded.**

**Poison Sumac: Stems that come off of the trunk are red and can contain loose berries.**

