# Poisonous Plants

Employees working outdoors are at risk of exposure to poisonous plants such as poison ivy, poison oak (western states) and poison sumac. The sap oil (urushiol) of these plants can come into contact with the skin and cause an allergic reaction. Burning these poisonous plants can produce a smoke that, when inhaled, can cause lung irritation.

## How You Can Be Exposed



- Direct contact with the plant itself
- Indirect contact such as touching tools, animals, or clothing with urushiol on them
- Inhalation of particles containing urushiol from the burning of poisonous plants

## Skin Contact Symptoms

- A red skin rash within a few days of contact
- Swelling
- Itching
- Possible bumps, patches, streaking, or weeping blisters (Note: Blister fluids are not contagious)

## First Aid

**If you are exposed to a poisonous plant:**

- Rinse skin immediately with rubbing alcohol, poison plant wash, or degreasing soap (dishwashing soap), or detergent, and plenty of water. Rinse frequently so that wash solutions do not dry on the skin and further spread the urushiol.
- Scrub under finger nails with a brush.
- Apply wet compresses, calamine lotion, or hydrocortisone cream to skin to reduce itching and blistering.
- In severe cases or if the rash is on the face or genitals, seek out professional medical attention.
- Call 911 or go to a hospital emergency room if you have a severe allergic reaction such as swelling or difficulty breathing.

## How to Protect Yourself

- Wear long sleeves, long pants, boots, and gloves. Be sure to wash exposed clothing separately in hot water with detergent.
- Clean tools with rubbing alcohol or soap and plenty of water. Urushiol can remain active on the surface of objects for up to 5 years. Wear disposable gloves during this process.
- Do not burn plants or brush piles that may contain poisonous plants. Inhalation of smoke from burning plants can cause severe allergic respiratory problems.

## References

The National Institute of Occupation Safety and Health (NIOSH) Guidance on Poisonous Plants

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