

Job Name: _____ Job Site Location: _____

Date: _____ Start Time: _____ Finish Time: _____ Foreman/Supervisor: _____

Topic 252: Poison Ivy/Oak/Sumac

Introduction: Direct skin contact with some plant's leaves can cause a severe reaction known as "**Allergic Contact Dermatitis**" and is sometimes called eczema. Plants that are best known to cause these terrible rashes are: Poison Ivy; Poison Oak; Poison Sumac; Poison Dogwood; and certain varieties of ragweed and primrose. Toxic chemicals produced by these plant's leaf surfaces can cause awful allergic reactions on some people's skin. Some people have severe reactions, while others barely have any, depending on the degree of exposure and other circumstances.



Whether at work or during recreational activities (such as camping or hiking), these plants are usually encountered in areas that are overgrown and undisturbed. If you're doing initial clearing of vegetation on a new site or are working adjacent to un-cleared native landscapes, recognition of these plants can save you a lot of itching and aggravation.

Poison Ivy, Oak, Sumac, and Dogwood belong to the botanical genus Rhus (the cashew family) and can be one of several woody vines.

- Poison Ivy (genus *Rhus radicans*) has greenish flowers, ivory colored berries, and three leaflets. It is found in wooded regions.
- Poison Oak (genus *Rhus toxicodendron* and *diversiloba*) many varieties exist and are widespread. Consult a horticulture manual for positive I. D.
- Poison Sumac (genus *Rhus vernix*) has greenish white flowers, hanging clusters of small grayish fruit, and leaves made up of 7 to 13 leaflets. It can be found in wetland areas around rivers and lakes.



The effects of contact dermatitis range from a mild, short-lived redness to severe swelling and blisters. It is an inflammation of the upper layers of the skin that cause an eruption of tiny, itching blisters, redness, swelling, oozing, scabbing, and scaling.

- The plant toxins are generally acquired through leaf surface contact on the bare moist skin of the hands, forearms, feet, and legs.
- At first, the rash is limited to the contact site, but later may spread to other parts of the body by rubbing and scratching with contaminated hands.
- Exposure may not be immediately realized; initially, the severe itching usually causes further complications due to rubbing and scratching before the person is aware of contact with the plant toxins.
- To further compound the problem, exposure to direct sunlight after bare skin contact with plant toxins can cause a condition known as "Photoallergic or Phototoxic Contact Dermatitis" which contributes greatly to the severity of the condition.



The medically approved treatment for "Allergic Contact Dermatitis" suggests that careful measures should be taken to avoid infection.

- To prevent infection and avoid further irritation, a person should clean the area regularly with antibacterial soap and water.
- Blisters should not be cut open; they may ooze and form crusts, but they will soon dry out.
- Scratching and rubbing the fluids from the blisters can cause the condition to spread.
- Dry bandages will also help prevent infection and should be used while sleeping.
- Corticosteroid creams or ointments usually relieve the symptoms of mild contact dermatitis, unless the person has a lot of blistering, as is common with poison ivy/oak.



Conclusion: If your geographical region is known to have these toxic plants, learn how to identify them. Avoiding the plants that cause the reaction is better than trying to treat an allergic reaction. When working or playing in wooded or overgrown locations, wear clothing that prevents exposure and protects your skin. Take special care while removing clothing to prevent skin from contacting the outside of the clothing that may have come in contact with the plants.

Work Site Review

Work-Site Hazards and Safety Suggestions: _____

Personnel Safety Violations: _____

Employee Signatures: _____
(My signature attests and verifies my understanding of and agreement to comply with, all company safety policies and regulations, and that I have not suffered, experienced, or sustained any recent job-related injury or illness.)

These guidelines do not supercede local, state, or federal regulations and must not be construed as a substitute for, or legal interpretation of, any OSHA regulations.