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Weekly Toolbox Talk

Hazards to Outdoor Workers

Outdoor workers are exposed to many types of hazards that depend on their type of work, geographic region, season, and duration of time they are outside. Outdoor workers include farmers, foresters, landscapers, groundskeepers, gardeners, painters, roofers, pavers, construction workers, laborers, mechanics, and any other worker who spends time outside. Outdoor workers should know about their workplace hazards, including hazard identification and recommendations for preventing and controlling their exposures.

Physical hazards to outdoor workers may include extreme heat, extreme cold, noise, lightning, and ultraviolet (UV) radiation. Extreme heat conditions can cause heat stroke, heat cramps, heat exhaustion, heat rash, and other problems. Extreme cold conditions can cause hypothermia, frostbite, and other problems.

Too much noise exposure may cause a temporary change in hearing or a temporary ringing in workers' ears (tinnitus). Repeated exposures to loud noise can lead to permanent, incurable hearing loss or tinnitus.

Lightning kills about 80 people in the United States each year and injures hundreds. Among construction workers, laborers, machine operators, engineers, roofers, and pipefitters have been struck by lightning most often on the job.

UV radiation can cause problems such as sunburn and skin cancer.

Biological hazards include vector-borne diseases, venomous wildlife and insects, and poisonous plants. Vector-borne diseases may be spread to workers by insects, such as mosquitoes, or ticks. When a mosquito or tick bites a worker, it may transfer a disease-causing agent, such as a parasite, bacterium, or virus.

Outdoor workers in the United States may be exposed to many types of venomous wildlife and insects. Venomous snakes, spiders, scorpions, and stinging insects can be found throughout various geographic regions. They are especially dangerous to workers who have allergies to the animal. Anaphylactic shock is the body's severe allergic reaction to a bite or sting and requires immediate emergency care. Thousands of people are stung each year, and as many as 40–50 people in the United States die each year from severe allergic reactions. Venomous U.S. snakes include rattlesnakes, copperheads, cottonmouths/water moccasins, and coral snakes. Stinging insects include bees, wasps, hornets, and fire ants. Venomous spiders include black widows, brown recluse spiders, and hobo spiders.

Poisonous plants found in the United States include poison ivy, poison oak, and poison sumac. These plants can cause allergic reactions if the leaves or stalks are damaged and come in contact with workers' skin. These plants can also be dangerous if they are burned and their toxins are inhaled by workers.