



TAILGATE SAFETY

THE ITCHY & SCRATCHY SHOW

Argh! That itchy and scratchy red rash you have is probably poison oak, especially if you've been in areas where it grows. Poison Oak is a common plant in Northern California that contains a poisonous sap (urushiol) that causes a reaction that includes itching, red inflammation, blistering of the skin, and oozing sores. Thousands of California workers seek medical treatment for poison oak dermatitis every year. While some individuals are less susceptible than others, no one is completely immune.

Recognizing and avoiding poison oak is half the battle. Unfortunately it can be found in a variety of habitats. It may flourish in the deep woods where soil moisture is plentiful or it may be found in very dry soil on the most exposed hillsides. It can grow as a vine, trailing shrub, or a woody shrub. The constant is the leaf. The poison oak leaf looks like a miniature oak leaf, a triple leaf pattern leading off one stem with prominent veins and a shiny surface. In some regions the leaves remain green during the entire time they are on the stem. In other areas the leaves change to various colors with the changing seasons. Contrary to popular belief, poison oak can be contracted after the leaves fall off. The bare wood and the roots also contain urushiol (sap).

Avoiding direct contact with the plants reduces the risk but does not guarantee against a reaction. Urushiol can stick to pets, garden tools, balls, clothes, or anything that comes into contact with it. If the urushiol is not washed off those objects or animals, just touching them could cause a reaction in a susceptible person.

Sometimes you have to enter or work in areas where there is poison oak. When this is necessary, certain precautions can be taken:

- Wear protective clothing such as long-sleeved shirts, long pants tied around the ankles, leather gloves with gauntlets and neckerchiefs.
- Several protective creams are available which form barriers to protect against the toxic oil found in all parts of the plant. There are also injections or tablets that provide protection for some people.
- When removing clothing, take shoes off first and leave them outside for decontamination by washing.
- Remove all clothing and wash it separately. When removing clothing put on some clean gloves to protect your hands.
- Any object you touch after having been exposed to poison oak can act as a carrier to contaminate others.
- If you come in contact with poison oak, wash immediately or take a shower, not a bath, using strong soap or detergent. You can also use isopropyl alcohol right away then wash skin with soap and water.
- When dressing, put shoes on last so that any poisonous substance remaining on shoes does not contaminate the inside of trousers.

If you don't cleanse quickly enough redness and swelling will appear in about 12 to 48 hours. Blisters and itching will follow. Oozing blisters are not contagious nor can the fluid cause further spreading of blisters on a person's body. No part of the plant should ever be eaten. It is a violent irritant and poisonous. Poison Oak should never be destroyed by burning. Inhalation of the smoke can damage the lungs. Destroy poison oak by using an approved vegetation spray to eradicate it.

Training Tips: a) Show pictures of the leaf of the poison oak plant and train your workers how to recognize and avoid it b) Hand out lotion, soap, etc. that helps prevent or wash up after exposure.



North Coast Builders Exchange ~Tailgate Topics
Ph (707) 542-9502 Fax (707) 542-2027