Protect Outdoor Workers From Ticks and Mosquitoes

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Summer is here, and so are our favorite six- and eight-legged pests! While most of these pests are harmless, some may be infected with harmful vector-borne diseases. While the most common of these in Vermont are Lyme disease in ticks and West Nile virus in mosquitoes, there is a risk that your outdoor workers can be exposed if they are bitten by any infected pest. To protect workers, it is important that municipalities implement effective training and preventive measures. Here are a few steps that you can take to increase employee awareness and decrease the chances of a work-related infection.

1. Train outdoor workers with information about

- how vector-borne diseases are spread,
- the risks of exposure and infection,
- how workers can protect themselves, and
- the importance of reporting workplace illnesses and injuries as soon as possible.

2. Recommend that workers wear hats and light-colored clothing (so they can see ticks easily) including long-sleeved shirts and long pants tucked into boots or socks.

3. Provide EPA-registered insect repellents containing DEET, picaridin, IR3535, lemon eucalyptus oil, para-menthane-diol, or 2-undecone.

4. Provide insecticides such as permethrin for greater protection. Permethrin kills ticks on contact and can be used on clothing (but not on skin).

5. Remind workers to check their skin and clothing for ticks every day, keeping in mind that immature ticks are very small and hard to see. Employees should carefully check not just their legs, torso, and arms but also their hair, underarms, and groin.

6. A person who finds a tick should immediately remove it using fine-tipped tweezers. The best way to remove a tick is to:

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- grasp the tick firmly as close to the skin as possible,
- pull the tick's body away from the skin with a steady motion, and
- clean the area with soap and water.

7. Encourage workers to wash and dry their work clothes using the "hot" setting, which will kill any ticks present.

8. Any worker who develops symptoms of a vector-borne disease should seek medical attention promptly. They should tell their doctor that they work outdoors and be sure to report any ticks or mosquito bites. Symptoms of vector-borne diseases include:

- body and/or muscle aches
- fever
- headache
- fatigue
- joint pain
- rash (bull's-eye or other)
- stiff neck
- paralysis

For more information, PACIF members may contact their Loss Control Consultant. Information on various hazards related to working outdoors is also available on OSHA's website.

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