

Working outdoors

This Safety Alert highlights some of the hazards associated with working outdoors and follows recent incidents including the death of an employee from a snake bite.

May 2016

This Alert provides information to assist in identifying and controlling risks associated with working outdoors, especially when working alone or in remote rural locations.

Background

Outdoor workers are exposed to many types of hazards depending on the type of work, geographic region, season, and duration of time they are outside. When working outdoors an emergency situation can result in death or increased severity of injury due to delays in accessing medical assistance. Recently:

- A catchment management employee was working along a river with two co-workers. He was struck high on the arm by a tiger snake while moving rocks. The man died as a result of the snake bite. Snakes can hide under rocks, in long grass, under leaf litter, fallen trees and branches where they are not easily seen.
- An employee was clearing trees under power lines and fell from an elevated work platform when he was attacked by a swarm of bees. He sustained a broken leg and ankle.
- An arborist was working 15 metres up a tree when he was attacked by a swarm of bees. He had an allergic reaction to the bee stings which was exacerbated by the time it took to safely rescue him from the tree to receive medical assistance. Bees and wasps nest in trees as well as in underbrush, abandoned burrows and fallen trees.

Recommended risk control measures

Employers must provide and maintain for employees a working environment that is safe and without risks to health, so far as is reasonably practicable. This applies at any workplace, including an outdoor worksite where employees or self-employed persons work, whether or not the work is undertaken in a building or structure.

Consider the following when devising safe systems of work for employees who work outdoors, especially those working alone or in isolation:

- written procedures addressing identified hazards and risk control measures for working outside:
 - how often employees should check-in with employer/other employees
 - what equipment should be carried with them (eg satellite phone, radio transmitter)
 - emergency meeting places
 - location of nearest hospitals and places where snake antivenin is available
 - weather guidelines
 - reporting of incidents (eg bites and stings).
- an emergency response plan, which details what employees should do in emergencies and ensure it is communicated to employees
- employee information with regards to allergies etc – ensure it is up-to-date and considered when allocating work. Employees should carry an Epi-pen at all times if they require it.
- suitable equipment, tools and personal protective equipment (PPE) is provided - such as long handled tools for weeding or working in long grass, snake gaiters, impervious gloves and boots, long sleeved shirts and pants, broad brimmed hat

- appropriate first aid equipment and training for the treatment of injuries, from minor scrapes and stings through to major trauma, allergies and heavy bleeding (eg snake bite, bee sting, serious lacerations).

Further information

Related WorkSafe publications

- Guidance Note - *Working alone*
- Guidance Note - *Sun protection for construction and other outdoor workers*
- First aid in the workplace – Compliance Code

Contact Details

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go to WorkSafe's website: **worksafe.vic.gov.au**