

Don't Forget to Protect Workers from Dangerous Insects



Employers have a duty to take reasonable steps to protect workers from *all* known hazards in the workplace, including insects and animals. It may seem silly but attacks by stinging bugs such as bees and wasps are a real threat to some workers'and can have very painful consequences.

For example, a U.S. Postal Service worker in Chicago was recently hospitalized after being attacked by a swarm of hornets while delivering mail.

The worker is expected to recover but she was stung between 30 and 50 times near her head and neck. A resident called 911 after hearing her screams. Landscapers working nearby may have aggravated the nest and set the hornets in motion.

Being bitten by insects such as bees, wasps, hornets and European fire ants may be painful and even deadly for workers who are allergic. And bites by other insects such as mosquitoes and ticks can transmit diseases such as Lyme disease and West Nile Virus.

According to NIOSH, here are some ways that workers can protect themselves from insect bites:

- Wear light-colored, smooth-finished clothing that covers as much of the body as possible.
- Avoid perfumed soaps, shampoos, and deodorants. And don't wear cologne or perfume.
- Wear clean clothing and bathe daily.
- Avoid flowering plants when possible.
- Keep work areas clean. Some insects are attracted to discarded food.
- Remain calm and still if a single stinging insect is flying around. Swatting may cause it to sting.
- If attacked by several stinging insects, run away. (Bees release a chemical when they sting, which attracts other bees.) Go indoors or to shaded areas, which are better than open ones. Don't jump into water. Some insects (such as Africanized honey bees) are known to hover above the water.
- If an insect is inside your vehicle, stop slowly and open all the windows.
- Workers with a history of severe allergic reactions to insect bites or stings should carry an epinephrine autoinjector (Epi-pen) and wear medical

ID jewelry stating their allergy.

If a worker *is* stung by an insect:

- Have someone stay with the worker to be sure that he doesn't have an allergic reaction.
- Wash the site with soap and water.
- Remove the stinger using gauze wiped over the area or by scraping a fingernail over the area. Never squeeze the stinger or use tweezers.
- Apply ice to reduce swelling.
- Don't scratch the sting, which may increase swelling, itching and risk of infection.