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U.S. Labor Department statistics rank logging as the second most dangerous occupation in the country. Most everyone is familiar with the big hazards – heavy equipment, extreme weather, remote locations, working alone, dizzying heights. But other dangers – some as small as a poppy seed – can also pack a devastating punch!

Snakes

Snakes are very sensitive to vibrations in the air and on the ground. So as logging vehicles roll into the forest or when chain sawing loggers begin their noisy work, often disturbing rock piles, fallen trees or other snake habitat, even brumating or dormant snakes can turn dangerous.

The U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) recommends caution when removing debris, and suggests that protective clothing not only cover arms and legs but include heavy gloves and boots that are at least 10 inches high. But when it's just you and the snake:

- Step way back and allow the snake to proceed. (Its striking distance is about half its total length.)
- If bitten, staying as still as possible will slow the spread of venom, if the snake's poisonous.
- As soon as possible, get medical attention. Note the color and shape of the snake's head to assist with treatment.
- Know your location, especially when working alone. Carry a charged cell phone in order to communicate with emergency personnel.
- **Do not** cut the wound or attempt to suck out the venom. Lie down, so the bite is below the level of the heart. Cover the wound with a clean, dry dressing.

Insects

Protective clothing – heavy socks, long pants and long-sleeved shirts – along with insect repellents containing DEET or Picaridin are often sufficient barriers to biting and stinging insects. But beware the small yet mighty **fire ant**!

When disturbed, these tiny predators, only 2 to 6 mm in size and often nesting in moist soil under rocks, timber and logs, bite, sting, then inject toxic venom that causes swelling, itching and painful blisters. Don't scratch! Usually over the counter hydrocortisone cream is sufficient to bring relief. But reactions like nausea, profuse sweating, difficulty breathing, slurred speech, serious swelling and chest pain are extreme allergic reactions requiring immediate emergency attention. Get help!

Ticks

These tiny critters, usually found within three feet of the ground, do not jump, crawl or fall on their prey. **But** when hair or clothing brush an object they are on, they simply latch on, then crawl "until they find a favorable site to feed." So prevent tick-borne diseases by avoiding tick bites. According to OSHA, here's how:

- Apply an insect repellent (DEET) that is effective against ticks.
- Tie back long hair and wear a hat.

- Wear long pants tucked into socks/boots or use tape to close the opening where they meet.
- Wear long sleeved shirts tucked into pants.
- Wear light colored clothing so that a tick can be seen more easily.

To transmit disease, ticks must stay “attached” for more than 36 hours. Frequent clothing and body checks, plus showering within two hours of working in a tick infested area are crucial. Place clothing in the dryer for at least 30 minutes to kill any ticks. Check your entire body, especially parts that bend (underarms, knees, between fingers and toes), points where clothing presses against skin (neck, belts, underwear elastic), hairline, top of head, in and around the ears, belly button.

Attached ticks should be immediately removed. With fine point tweezers grasping the tick’s mouth parts as close to the skin as possible, apply steady pressure upward until the tick releases. With antiseptic, clean the wound and tweezers. To have the tick checked for disease, place it in a clean Ziploc bag with a blade of grass, and contact your State Health Department.

Learn more about these small but “mighty” critters at www.osha.gov, www.fda.gov, www.MayoClinic.com.