

Anchor Risk Management Article

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Venomous Spiders Pose Workplace Threat



All homes and offices have spiders, especially those with storage closets and warehouse operations. Businesses in the Southwestern United States often have two particularly unwelcome visitors in the black widow and brown recluse spiders.

Spiders are particularly active in springtime, so we urge all employers warn employees to exercise caution when in areas most likely to be inhabited by spiders.

Black Widow Spiders

Description - Different varieties of black widows inhabit different parts of the United States, but share general characteristics. The female is larger and can deliver more venom to humans than the male.

The spider is recognizable by its distinctive bulbous shape, shiny black in color with red markings in the shape of an hourglass on the underside. Many females also have a red or orange patch on top of the abdomen. They vary considerably in size, especially when carrying eggs.

Where to Find Them - Southern black widows prefer dark, sheltered areas, such as crawl spaces under houses, stacked firewood, under boards and furniture, inside boxes, in seldom-worn shoes, under debris, around drainage pipes and false ceiling areas.

Response to Bites - a black widow bite may feel like a pinprick, resulting in pain a few hours later, but usually not immediately. In extreme cases, chills, fever, deep nausea and even paralysis are possible.

If an employee is bitten, apply ice immediately and seek medical treatment. Reapply ice every 10 minutes. If possible, capture the spider for medical professionals to identify precisely so they can provide care accordingly.

Your continuing effort is essential to Loss Control, compliance with OSHA and all other safety legislation. Our assistance may be used as an adjunct in certain areas of that effort, but we assume and have no responsibility to you or others for the control or correction of conditions or practices existing at your premises whether or not listed in this report. Further, we do not warrant that the completion of any recommendations in this report will assure that the premises or operations are safe or healthful, or are in compliance with any law, rule or regulation.

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Brown Recluse Spiders

Description - Brown recluse spiders are small, usually between 1/4 inch and 3/4 inch, but may grow larger. Coloration may be brown, gray, or a deep yellow, with a violin-shaped darker patch on the top side, the neck of the violin pointed toward the rear of the spider.

Where to Find Them - These spiders spin webs behind almost any object, including clothes, boxes and books. As their name implies, they prefer areas less frequented, which makes storage shelves likely spots to find them.

Brown recluse spiders especially like cardboard when dwelling in human residences, and have been found in shoes, dressers, in bed sheets of infrequently used beds, in stacks or piles of clothes, and behind baseboards and pictures.

You may find them near heat sources when temperatures drop below normal. They travel in boxes and other containers, so use caution when handling boxes, especially those stored for any appreciable time. Many people report bites when putting on clothing not worn recently

Response to Bites - A brown recluse bite may not be immediately obvious or even noticed. Over time the wound may grow to as large as 10 inches across. Bites usually become painful and itchy within 2 to 8 hours. Pain worsens 12 to 36 hours after the bite, and necrosis, or rotting of the flesh may develop over the next few days. It is important to receive medical attention within 48 hours of the bite.

Protection Against Bites

Wear long-sleeved shirts, gloves and hats for protection when working in areas likely to have spiders. Insect repellents, including DEET and Picaridin, should be applied on clothing and other apparel.

Any time you have an occupational safety question, please call Bill Propes at 214-295-1563 or email him at bpropes@combinedgroup.com for more information