



# INDUSTRY SAFETY ALERT

## Serious Wasp Risks for Fall Forestry Work

**Location:** All regions of British Columbia

Weather conditions have resulted in an unusually high level of wasp activity this year. A mild winter resulted in high survival rates of queen wasps, producing more colonies, and hot dry summer conditions have increased the level of wasp aggression and overall activity. Several hikers and rock climbers have required emergency evacuation after experiencing multiple stings already this year. In one case, a person was stung nearly 100 times.

Workers involved in activities such as tree planting or brushing in complex terrain may be exposed to increased risk of multiple stings due to obstacles blocking their escape from wasp attacks.

Large numbers of stings can result in a life-threatening condition, even for individuals with no history of allergic reactions. Allergic reactions often become more serious over time, and individuals with a history of even minor reactions can face serious risks if stung again or stung multiple times. In rare cases, individuals with no history of being stung have experienced life-threatening reactions after just a single sting.

Educating workers about the hazards of wasps and other stinging insects and having a strong emergency plan is critical for isolated forestry work.

### **Avoidance:**

- Tucking pants into socks and wearing long sleeve shirts can limit wasps getting underneath clothing.
- Ground workers such as tree planters should not listen to music (using speakers or headphones) while working in areas with high wasp-activity, so they can keep alert for buzzing sounds.
- If a nest is disturbed in steep terrain, workers should move quickly and carefully across the hill to a safe location at least 50 feet from the nest, without rushing and creating risks of falling and further injury. The urge to panic and run should be resisted. It may be necessary to stop and remove wasps that have become entangled in hair or attached to clothing to prevent further stinging. Wasps will seldom pursue more than 100 feet.
- Workers should be instructed to warn others of nests they find if they expect others to enter the area. Flagging tape wrapped around a stick can be used to help indicate nest locations.
- Areas with numerous gullies, ditches, and small watercourses may have more wasp nests, and employers should try to avoid deploying workers with allergies into such areas.



BC **Forest Safety**

Unit 8C - 2220 Bowen Road, Nanaimo, BC, V9S 1H9  
Toll Free: 1.877.741.1060 | [bcforestsafe.org](http://bcforestsafe.org)



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## Treatment:

- Allergic (anaphylactic) reactions are serious life-threatening conditions, and workers who show serious allergic response to stings should be transported to hospital without delay. WorkSafeBC considers serious allergic reactions to be rapid transport criteria (RTC) situations, and the fastest possible mode of transport should be chosen.
- Epi-pen injections generally last only 20 to 30 minutes, and multiple injections may be necessary for workers who are stung and experience allergic reactions in remote locations. Having multiple epi-pens is recommended for large crews or crews with members with history of allergic reactions. Any worker that receives an epi-pen injection must be immediately transported to hospital for further evaluation and treatment.
- It is not mandatory for employers to provide epi-pens, but epi-pens should be strongly considered when working in isolated areas, or any area with high risks of wasp exposure.
- Warn workers that the use of Benadryl antihistamines can result in drowsiness due to the ingredient diphenhydramine. Even small doses can result in impairment, making operation of equipment or any forestry work more dangerous. Use of “second generation” antihistamines that contain cetirizine, loratadine, or fexofenadine is recommended. These types of antihistamines generally provide equal relief with fewer negative interactions with other medications and without inducing drowsiness. Workers should consult a pharmacist about using any over-the-counter medication if they are currently using other prescriptions.
- Relief from milder sting reactions can be achieved through use of cold compresses, pain-relief medications, sting-relief ointments, and elevation of affected limbs.
- Serious allergic reactions generally occur within a few minutes or hours of a sting. Delayed serious reactions rarely occur, but delayed moderate to mild reactions are common, and workers who show only mild effects may suffer significant pain and swelling within a day of the sting. First aid attendants and employers should check in with workers who are stung to monitor their response.
- Extreme exertion can aggravate the effects of a sting, and workers should rest immediately and inform others following a sting to ensure their reaction is under control.

## Working with allergies

Workers with a history of allergic reactions should alert their employer of their condition and carry an epi-pen on their person. While workers may not be legally required to disclose personal medical information, the employer cannot take steps to ensure worker safety if they do not disclose their allergies.

Workers with allergies are encouraged to inform other crew members of their condition, so they can receive prompt assistance in the case of an emergency.

Workers with a history of allergic reactions should be monitored closely and stay in constant communication with other workers to ensure they can receive help if needed. A radio should be provided to workers in these conditions.

*Submitted by Jordan Tesluk, BC Forestry Safety Advocate. To share a safety alert click [here](#)*



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