



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Connecticut, thousands of public sector employees in outdoor work places experience daily casual exposures to the risk of tick bites. Tick bites are a recognized hazard by the Department of Public Health (DPH) and Conn-OSHA; employers must try to create an environment that is hazard free (see OSHA General Duty Clause).]

INCIDENT BACKGROUND

The injured employee is an equipment operator with a CIRMA member Public Works Department. The employee has been working for the town for about two (2) years. In the morning on the date of the loss, the employee was cutting brush for “a couple of hours.” When the employee returned home after his shift that evening, he observed a tick on his upper leg / hip area. The employee used tweezers to remove the tick and flushed the tick down the toilet. The Injured Employee only reported this incident a few days later once his symptoms began to worsen.

INVESTIGATION

The incident occurred in April. In the morning on the date of the loss, the injured employee was assigned to cut back brush along the perimeter of a municipal park.

- The employee was wearing long, dark pants, a short-sleeved, neon orange shirt, and work boots. The employee believes that he was wearing long socks, but could not remember exactly.
- The employee reportedly worked on this task for “about three or four hours.”
- The employee continued his shift without issue or discomfort.

At the end of the employee’s shift, he returned home. Upon changing, he observed a tick on his upper leg / hip area. It was later approximated that this occurred about six or seven hours after he concluded cutting back the brush in the park.

The employee removed the tick at home with the use of tweezers. The employee believes that he pinched the tick at the top of its body, wiggled the tick back and forth, and pulled the tick vertically up off of the skin.

Once the tick was removed, the employee flushed the tick down the toilet. Further investigation determined that the department was in the process of creating a tick policy due to the increase in tick bites throughout the region; however, this policy was not yet completed and had not been communicated throughout the department. In addition, the last training that the department had provided to their employees on tick illness and prevention occurred

four (4) years prior.

INJURY AND DAMAGES

The day after the Injured Employee removed the tick, he noticed a red mark the size of a quarter on his hip. The employee did not report the mark to his supervisor and instead went to work that day. Upon waking up the following morning, the Injured Employee developed the following symptoms:

- A red rash (approximately the size of a baseball) from his right upper leg up to his abdomen;
- A fever of 102°;
- Ringing in his ears;
- A headache; and
- Exhaustion.

Immediately, the employee called his supervisor to report the symptoms and went to the Initial Care Provider (ICP), who took the patient’s bloodwork and put the employee temporarily out of work. A few days later, the bloodwork results came back and the Injured Employee was diagnosed with Lyme disease. The employee was prescribed antibiotics and recovered from his illness. Ultimately, the employee missed a total of seven (7) weeks of work.

As a result of the incident, the Workers’ Compensation claim cost approximately **\$15,500**.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Communicate to employees that all work-related injuries and illnesses should be reported as soon as possible, in accordance with the department’s Workers’ Compensation claims reporting process.
- Ensure that all Job Hazard Assessments for occupations responsible for conducting work outdoors include information related to tick bite exposures.
- Consider updating the department’s Tick Policy to include the following information:
 - Examples of work and locations where tick exposures are common
 - Identification of proper Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and how to use it
 - Inspection process and self-checks
 - Removal of ticks
 - Incident reporting to supervisor procedures
- Provide training to employees who are required to work outdoors as part of their job responsibilities on the following:

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- The employer’s tick policy
- General awareness on ticks, such as where they are likely to be found and common illnesses carried by ticks
- Personal Protective Equipment (OSHA 29 CFR 1910.132(a))
- Consider utilizing the CIRMA’s Tick Bites and Employer Responsibilities Bulletin and/or consulting with your CIRMA Risk Management Consultant for additional information on tick policies and training.
- Consider participating in the Voluntary OSHA Compliance Program available through CONN-OSHA as an additional resource to review current policies and training efforts.

For more information on this topic, please contact your CIRMA Risk Management Consultant.