

Pests in British Columbia

ACTSAFE SAFETY BULLETIN #31

This bulletin provides guidelines for working safely on locations in British Columbia where there may be pests. Although pests and other wildlife may vary from region to region, basic safeguards should be taken to prevent incidents that can result in serious injuries or illness for performers and crew. Generally, a pest is considered to be any living thing that can have a negative effect on humans. Pests may be things that can injure humans or spread or cause disease. This bulletin describes the more common pests in B.C., including stinging and biting insects, snakes, spiders, rodents, racoons, skunks, bats, and birds.

This bulletin doesn't include information on wildlife such as bears, cougars, wolves, and coyotes. For information on those animals, see bulletin #47 – Wildlife in British Columbia.

HAZARDS

Typical hazards from pests include stings, bites, and exposure to droppings that can potentially result in allergic reactions, poisonings, airborne diseases, and zoonotic diseases. Zoonotic diseases range from mild gastrointestinal illnesses such as giardiasis (beaver fever) to rabies, which is fatal if left untreated.

CONTROL MEASURES

Your production should have a health and safety program in place with information on pests that may be encountered when filming on location. Information should include how to:

- Identify pests and their signs
- Avoid or control them
- Respond to incidents involving pests

Workers who may encounter pests in the course of their work must receive related education and safety training.

General safety precautions

- Never feed or approach animals such as racoons or skunks. Food-conditioned animals may become aggressive with humans.
- When working in areas that may have pests such as insects or spiders, consider wearing long pants with the legs tucked into socks or boots. A good boot above the ankle will provide better protection. Consider wearing gloves, a hat, a long-sleeved shirt, and dress in layers.
- Wear light colours, which attract insects less and make them easier to spot.
- Follow instructions when applying repellents such as DEET.
- Avoid using scented products, as they attract some pests.

Bites, scratches, or stings

If you have any known allergies, carry reaction medication and notify the first aid attendant or safety representative either ahead of time or when you arrive at the location.

If you are bitten, scratched, or stung by a pest, report to first aid immediately. Even if the pest seems harmless, you should report to first aid if you experience an allergic or averse reaction. Depending on the severity of your reaction, you may be instructed to seek medical attention.

Fire ants



Fire ants can be found in shady areas such as foliage and grasses. Their nests have a distinctive mound that pushes upward and causes the ground to bulge. They can swarm rapidly and sting, injecting a

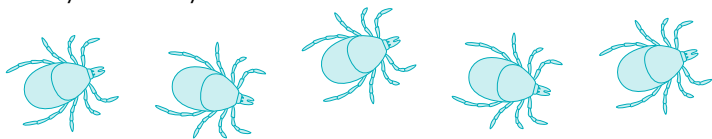
Pests in British Columbia

ACTSAFE SAFETY BULLETIN #31

venom. Most people who are stung will experience skin inflammation, pain, irritation, or a burning sensation that can last up to 10 minutes. Fluid-filled blisters can appear 6 hours to a day afterward. If you're allergic to the venom, you may require immediate medical attention.

Ticks

Ticks have small, hard-shelled bodies and eight legs. They are found in tall grass, wooded areas, open fields, overgrown vegetation, and on or near animals such as deer, mice, and birds. In areas where there may be ticks, check your clothing and scalp frequently. At the end of the day, check your entire body carefully.



If you've been bitten, report to first aid immediately. Ticks can be difficult to remove because of their barbed mouth parts. A slow and gentle pull with tweezers as close to the skin as possible works best. Apply antiseptic after removal and monitor for signs or symptoms of tick-borne diseases.

Once the tick is removed, save it in a tight-fitting container so it can be tested for diseases such as tick paralysis, Lyme disease, and Rocky Mountain spotted fever. For more information, see Related Resources at the end of this document. All work-related tick bites should be documented with first aid, even if they are discovered after the worker has left the worksite.

Other biting insects

There are many different species of mosquitoes and flies (e.g., horseflies or deer flies) in B.C. They can be found in wooded areas and near or on animals, refuse areas, or water, particularly standing water. These insects can bite and may carry diseases such as West Nile disease.

Chiggers are red, tiny insects that smear red when crushed. They live on the ground around shrubs and plants, and in tall weeds, grass, and wooded areas. Chigger bites produce intense itching, skin discolouration, and clusters of small bumps. Use chigger bite ointment to remove the itch and promote healing.



Stinging, flying insects



Bees, hornets, and wasps can be found everywhere, are attracted to open food sources, and are generally dormant at night. They can produce a mild to painful sting that causes allergic reactions in some. People who are allergic should carry reaction medication.

Black widow spiders



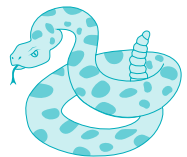
Black widow spiders are found in southern B.C., mostly in the Okanagan, along the Coast, and on southern Vancouver Island. They live in low-lying webs in dark, undisturbed locations, such as in garages, under rocks, in wood piles, and around old buildings. Their venom is a neurotoxin that can have severe health effects. If you have been bitten, notify first aid and seek immediate medical treatment. If necessary, call a hospital or local poison control centre.

Scorpions



Northern scorpions are tan with brown stripes on the back and they have large round pincers. They can be found under rocks or fallen wood in parts of southern B.C., including the Okanagan. Northern scorpion stings are mild (similar to a hornet) and can produce localized numbness lasting up to four hours. Their venom is not life threatening unless you have an allergic reaction.

Rattlesnakes



Rattlesnakes have camouflage colouring and jointed rattles on the tail. In B.C., they are found in the dry southern valleys, including the Okanagan, Kettle, Similkameen, Nicola, and Thompson River valleys, and along the Fraser River in the Lytton-Lillooet area.

Rattlesnakes produce painful bites that can be fatal. They don't have to be coiled to strike. If bitten, immediately notify first aid and seek medical attention:

- Loosely immobilize the affected body part and position it at heart level or higher.
- Don't apply a tourniquet, incise the wound, or attempt to suck out the venom.

Pests in British Columbia

ACTSAFE SAFETY BULLETIN #31

- Try to minimize physical activity.
- Note the time and part of body bitten.

Tips to avoid snakes

- Stay aware of your surroundings and look where you're putting your feet and hands.
- Walk along cleared paths as much as possible, and go around rocks and logs rather than stepping over them.
- Never pick up a snake or make quick moves if you see or hear a rattle.
- Never touch a dead rattlesnake. Their biting reflex remains even after death.
- Be careful when working at night after a hot day. Snakes may come out unexpectedly.

Racoons

Racoons can be aggressive and spread disease. If a racoon approaches you, yell and make loud noises to scare it away. Keep an eye out for racoon latrines at the bases of trees, or on flat surfaces such as logs, rocks, woodpiles, or human-built structures. Wear masks, goggles, and gloves when cleaning up after racoons.

Skunks

Skunks are nocturnal, timid animals and are not often seen during the day. Give them a wide berth. Skunk spray contains sulphuric acid, which can cause temporary blindness, breathing difficulties, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea. When a skunk is about to spray, it will bend its body into a U-shape with its face and raised tail facing its target.

Exposure to animal diseases

Animals such as rodents, bats, birds, and racoons can carry diseases such as histoplasmosis or parasites such as roundworms. These can be spread through bites or exposures to feces or urine. For example, people can be exposed to hantavirus by breathing in mouse or rat droppings that are disturbed. Pest control and cleanup should be carried out by trained professionals.

RELATED RESOURCES

- [Information on Lyme Disease](#) (BCCDC)
- [Insect Repellent](#) (BCCDC)
- [Orkin Pest Library](#)
- [Protecting Yourself from Ticks](#) (WorkSafeBC)
- [Wildlife & Insects](#) (WorkSafeBC)
- [Zoonotic Diseases](#) (BCCDC)

Actsife (www.actsafe.ca) is a not-for-profit health and safety association supporting British Columbia's arts and entertainment industries. Actsife provides resources and training to employers, workers, and supervisors. We are always here to provide information relevant to best practices around health and safety in the arts and entertainment industries in B.C.

Disclaimer: The information contained in Actsife's products (including, but not limited to, our training materials and courses) is for educational purposes only and is not intended to provide legal or other advice to you. Actsife's products are not a substitute for obtaining appropriate legal or other advice from legal or other professionals. Actsife's products have been developed based on information available as at the date of preparation. Actsife does not make any warranty or representation as to the accuracy or completeness of information contained in its products or the suitability of such information for any purpose. Neither Actsife Safety Association nor any person or entity involved in the production of Actsife's products shall be liable for any loss, injury, claim, liability or damages of any kind resulting from the use or reliance on the product for any purpose.

