Insect Repellents Meeting Kit



WHAT’S AT STAKE

Insect repellents might seem harmless but using them the wrong way can lead to serious problems. These products are made with strong chemicals designed to keep bugs away – but if you’re not careful, they can irritate your skin, affect your breathing, or cause reactions that land you in the hospital.

The real risk isn’t just a few mosquito bites. If you skip using repellent, you open the door to diseases like Lyme disease, West Nile virus, or Zika – illnesses that can cause long-term health problems. On the other hand, if you apply it too heavily or don’t follow instructions, you can end up with chemical burns or accidentally poison yourself or others.

WHAT’S THE DANGER

Insect repellents might seem simple, but using them incorrectly or skipping them altogether can lead to serious health issues. Whether you’re working outdoors in the woods, around standing water, or on a construction site, the danger goes beyond just bug bites.

Disease-Carrying Insects

Mosquitoes and ticks are not just pests – they can carry dangerous illnesses like Lyme disease, West Nile virus, Zika virus, and Rocky Mountain spotted fever. These diseases can lead to fever, fatigue, joint pain, or even long-term neurological or cardiac problems. A single bite from an infected insect can cause serious health issues and take someone off the job for days, weeks, or even permanently.

Improper Use of Repellents

While insect repellents help reduce risk, they can become a hazard if misused. Spraying repellents too close to the eyes, overapplying, or using the wrong product for the job can result in chemical burns, breathing issues, or allergic reactions. Workers may think they’re protected, but poor use gives a false sense of security and leaves them exposed.

Example:

A ground maintenance worker forgets to apply repellent before clearing brush in a wooded area. A week later, he develops a rash and joint pain. After visiting a doctor, he’s diagnosed with Lyme disease, likely from a tick bite. The worker now needs time off and long-term treatment.

Other Dangers Include:

- Heat and sweat reducing effectiveness of repellents, leaving skin exposed longer than expected
- Applying repellent near open flames (such as citronella torches or equipment), increasing fire risk
- Using repellent on broken or irritated skin, leading to stinging, infection, or systemic absorption

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Using insect repellent safely is key to protecting yourself not only from bites, but also from the potential health hazards of the repellents themselves. When used properly, these products can prevent serious diseases like Lyme disease or West Nile virus — but misuse or overuse can lead to skin irritation, breathing issues, or even chemical exposure. Here’s how to stay safe while getting the protection you need.

Choose the Right Product for the Job

Not all insect repellents are created equal. Choose one that fits your environment and exposure risk. For example, if you’re working near stagnant water, you may need a repellent with a higher DEET concentration. On the other hand, if you’re indoors or in a low-risk area, a lighter formula or natural option may be enough. Always check the label for approved use on skin, clothing, or gear, and never use industrial-strength products made for gear on your body.

Apply and Store Safely

Before applying, check your skin — avoid broken or irritated areas. Spray or wipe repellent evenly over exposed skin and clothing. If it’s an aerosol, never spray directly into your face; spray onto your hands first, then apply carefully. Avoid getting repellent near your eyes, mouth, and food. After your shift, wash treated skin with soap and water. Always store repellents in a cool, dry place away from sunlight or open flames, and make sure containers are tightly closed to prevent leaks or fumes.

How to Act if There’s a Reaction

Sometimes, even when used correctly, repellents can cause irritation or allergic reactions. If you or a coworker notices a rash, dizziness, trouble breathing, or eye discomfort after applying repellent, stop using it immediately and wash the affected area with mild soap and water. Move to fresh air and seek medical help if symptoms persist or worsen. Always report any reaction to your supervisor — it helps keep the whole team safe by preventing future incidents.

Combine Protection Without Risks

Avoid mixing products unless the label says it’s safe. Some people try to mix insect repellent with sunscreen, but that can cause the chemicals to break down

or react. If you need both, apply sunscreen first, let it dry, then apply repellent on top.

Key Tips to Stay Safe:

- Don’t apply insect repellent under clothing
- Wash treated skin after your shift ends
- Never use bug sprays labeled “gear only” on your body
- If repellent gets in your eyes, rinse for 15 minutes and seek medical help
- Reapply only as often as the label recommends

FINAL WORD

Insect repellents help protect us from serious health risks, but only when used correctly. Whether you’re applying spray before a shift outdoors or using treated clothing on a jobsite, it’s important to follow the label, apply it safely, and avoid overexposure.