

The purpose of this article is to share some of my newly acquired education with those of you who might benefit from my current ordeal.

The following is not intended to treat, diagnose, or cure anything.

I started Land Surveying in 1985 at the age of 15, working for my dad in San Diego during my summer vacation. Respect for the powerful plant called poison oak was learned at an early age, after developing a really good case from head to toe. I have always battled the plant in small amounts throughout my career, and very few large cases as I have grown older. Sitting at the computer with a good case of it right now, one has time reflect on the awesome power of this devilish plant. Along this path, I was treated by a doctor that has actually encountered the plant and understands the power and the affect it has on us when we come in contact with it.

Once you come in contact with the plant it is recommended you wash with a product called Tecnu as soon as possible. There are numerous other remedies such as washing your body with Tide granules, baking soda, and alcohol, but I personally find that Tecnu does a really good job. If you plan to work around this horrible plant it is recommended you invest in some Tecnu and if possible a disposable Tyvek® Coverall.

Poison oak contains a chemical called urushiol, which produces an allergic reaction of the skin causing inflammation and swelling. Poison ivy or poison oak causes a reaction from direct contact with the skin, contact with the smoke of burning plants, or contact with clothes that have been in direct contact with the plant. Contrary to popular belief, poison oak does not spread from the oozing of the skin lesions; if it spreads it is by recontamination with something that has not been properly cleaned.

Clothes should be washed with powdered laundry detergent and cold water. You can even add some Tecnu to the laundry load just to be sure. Wipe down everything you have touched with Tecnu and/or rubbing alcohol. One can never be too careful, as you are about to embark on a horrible journey. If you are allergic, I would suggest at the first sign of rash to get a shot from the doctor of prednisone or cortisone.



To remove the oils from your skin, shower in Tecnu then follow it up with an Aveeno moisturizing bar with colloidal oatmeal, both in cold water. Get used to taking a shower with only cool water, not hot water. Be sure to treat everything, and I mean everything, that came into contact with you during your encounter.

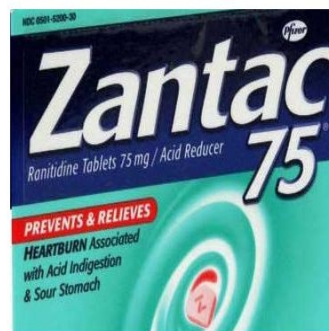
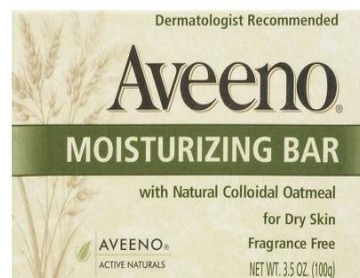
Now get ready for the itchy battle as some secrets that have helped me are revealed. Zantac is a drug that is over-the-counter and belongs to a class known as a histamine-2 blocker. This drug is used to treat ulcers and at the same time is an antacid. Guess what, this H2 blocker also reduces the swelling and itching from poison oak. In addition to taking Zantac or its generic form, ranitidine, your doctor should prescribe a cream that helps the healing and itching. Triamcinolone Acetonide 0.1% is something I highly recommend to get the job done. Over-the-counter cortisone cream is also helpful when the itching becomes unbearable and in between doses of the Triamcinolone.

Sunburns and hot water can cause histamine to be released in the body which induces swelling and redness in poison oak. Ibuprofen is the best for pain relief. Stay away from aspirin, alcoholic beverages, and swimming in chlorine as these also cause histamines to be released in the body. If possible, a swim in the ocean is best after contamination and during the healing process.

For those of us who thought scalding hot water at 2 o'clock in the morning to get us through the night was a good option, I give you something else. Soothing bath treatment in the form of a colloidal oatmeal preparation used in the shower also works great. Colloidal oatmeal is nothing more than a finely ground oatmeal, which can be done in a coffee grinder. Make a paste out of it and let stand for about 15 minutes. I recommend soaking in a bathtub only when you are convinced there is no more recontamination going on. Attached are photos of everything I recommend you ask for from your doctor, in addition to what can be obtained from your local drug store.

I have seen too many surveyors suffer from this in my day and I only hope this brings our profession some relief.

John Butcher PLS, RLS, CFedS



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