

Ref: 61-2018 Blackthorn: Injury to Hand

INVESTIGATION LESSONS SUMMARY

Type of Incident

Injury to hand following exposure to blackthorn bush.

Business Unit/Location

ADAS ENT/Bristol.

Brief Account of Incident

An RSK employee was undertaking some vegetation clearance as part of a badger sett closure. Upon placing their hand to the ground, they encountered a blackthorn which pierced the glove and become embedded within the palm of the employee's hand.

The hand swelled in response, and the employee found that they were unable to move their fingers the following day. The hand was treated with antiseptic whilst on site, and further medical assistance was not sought. The fingers resumed normal movement several days later.

What Went Right?

- A health, safety and environment plan and accompanying risk assessments had been prepared for the works, which had been signed to confirm acceptance and understanding of the arrangements by all involved in the undertaking of the works. Thorny plants were identified as a hazard within the risk assessments, whilst the plan also instructed that thick gloves should be worn.
- The incident was treated on site immediately following occurrence. A first aid kit was available for use.
- The injury incident was reported in accordance with reporting timescales to accidents@rsk.co.uk.

What Went Wrong?

- The gloves worn were CUT5 rated, which are appropriate for reducing the risk from cutting tools but are often inadequate to prevent the occurrence of thorn, needlestick and other puncture wounds.



(Stock photo – not an actual image of the injury in this report)

Lessons Learned

- Blackthorn can cause deep often barely visible wounds and may require medical attention to ensure that the thorn fragments are fully removed, with a high risk of infection if not treated and cleaned correctly. Employees at the greatest risk of exposure shall **use heavy duty leather gloves or those that have a needlestick resistance rating**. Needlestick resistance isn't currently tested to an industry standard, so it is important to select brands that are highly trusted. It is also important to consider if the glove will need additional protective properties for other purposes, such as protection from sharp blades. This may restrict the brands that can be used when selecting the most suitable glove.
- Ensure when you go to site **you have a first aid box and can access it quickly in the event of an injury**. If you are a long way from your vehicle/site compound, you must consider if you need to move your first aid kit and eye washes closer to your work area.
- Remember, any thorny shrub (e.g. Hawthorn) that can cause a deep penetrating wound can develop into an infection. **You must ensure that you have sufficient hand protection and long-sleeved cover**. Depending on the nature of the works, protective arm guards may also be used.

How is the item to be cascaded and implemented?

Toolbox talk Team briefing SHEQ notice board Process change Supply chain
SHE induction Other