POISON OAK

Poison oak grows throughout California. It can be found from sea level to 5000 feet of elevation. Poison oak contains an oily sap in all parts of the plant including the roots, stem, leaves, flowers and fruit. The toxic chemical that causes skin irritation is called urushiol. 50% to 80% of the population has a more severe allergic reaction when exposed.

How do you recognize poison oak?
Poison oak leaves normally consist of three leaflets. In late spring and summer the foliage is glossy green witch later turns to shades of orange and red. Poison oak loses its leaves in winter making it very hard to recognize.
**SURVEY SAFETY TIP #6**

**What are the symptoms of poison oak?**
Skin irritation characterized by redness, blistering, swelling and severe itching that generally develops 24 to 48 hours after exposure.

**How contagious is poison oak?**
Fluid in the blisters does not contain the toxic chemical, urushiol. If the blisters break, the fluid will not cause the poison oak to spread. Scratching other parts of the body with contaminated fingernails can spread poison oak. The toxic chemical can remain under the nails for several days unless carefully removed by thorough cleaning of the nails.

**How do you treat poison oak?**
Treatments consist mainly of protecting the damaged skin, preventing infection and relieving the itching. There are some products on the market including tecnu and calagel that can be applied prior to and after exposure that can lessen the effects of urushiol.

**How do you prevent poison oak?**
Learn to recognize the characteristics of the plant. Wear protective clothing. If necessary, disposable white paper coveralls can be obtained through the survey supplies at Piper Technical Center. Wash affected area with soap and cool water as soon as possible. Rubbing alcohol and water can be used on contaminated tools to avoid spreading the poison oak. You should also launder clothes several times before re-wearing. Never burn poison oak, it can result in dangerous smoke that can cause severe symptoms to the eyes, nose, throat and lungs.