

Deer Ticks and Lyme Disease:
Surveyors' Natural Enemies
Mark Amirault, Klein Agency, LLC

Spring has arrived along with warm weather and the prospect of getting back out in the field. When the weather is nice, it's difficult to think about the pitfalls of working outside, but injury can be an unfortunate hazard of being a Surveyor. The safety measures taken for clearing brush or climbing steep embankments can be self evident, but more often overlooked are the necessary precautions to take when the field crews shed their layers of winter clothing and head out to the woods, fields, and roadside locations.

During the months of May, June, and July, ticks become more active in the woods, brush, high grass, and leafy areas. Of particular concern are deer ticks, which are the principal transmitter of Lyme disease. With over 23,000 reported cases in 2005, the CDC reports that Lyme disease is the most commonly reported tick-borne disease in the United States. Lyme disease is prevalent in the Northeast; therefore, Surveyors from Maine to Virginia are at the highest risk of exposure to infected ticks. However, use these simple precautions and you can reduce the chance of infection.

Before heading out to the field, here are some key steps to protect from tick bites:

- Wear a hat and light colored clothing.
- Continue to wear long-sleeved shirts and long pants.
- Tuck your pants into your boots.
- Always keep insect repellent (preferably with DEET) in the truck and apply as directed prior to working in the brush or woods.
- For additional protection, use permethrin (an insecticide) directly on your clothes. Permethrin can be purchased at outdoor equipment stores; it kills ticks on contact and can last on clothes for a couple of washes. It should never be used directly on skin.

Upon returning from the field, be sure to check your skin and clothes for any unwanted pests. The younger stages (larvae and nymphs) of deer ticks are very small and can be hard to see. Remember the following:

- Always check your hair, underarms, and groin area for ticks.
- Ticks should always be removed with tweezers. Grab as closely to the skin as possible, pull away in a swift motion, and clean the area with soap and water.
- Wash clothes and dry in a hot dryer to kill any ticks that may have been missed.

Don't worry – not all ticks are carriers of Lyme disease. If you are bitten by an infected tick, recent studies show that the tick must be attached to your skin for at least 36-48 hours in order to transmit Lyme disease. That is why it's imperative to always check yourself but do pay attention for the following symptoms:

- A circular rash that resembles a bulls-eye that begins at the site of the bite and expands out with the center of the rash staying clear.

- Fevers, joint and muscle pains, headaches, chills, fatigue, and swollen lymph nodes are common with Lyme disease.

As with most diseases, an early diagnosis is the key to treatment and recovery. The most common treatment for Lyme disease is antibiotics, particularly if the treatment is started early. Untreated, Lyme disease has been known to cause severe, long-term health problems. Even with early detection and treatment, it is not unusual that some workers may have some bouts of the following that can last up months or years after treatment:

- Severe muscle and joint pains (especially in the knees).
- Arthritis.
- Sleep disturbance.
- Fatigue.

As a profession that spends so much time outside, make it a point this Spring and Summer to not fall victim to this small but powerful tick and the potential of getting Lyme disease. Taking the appropriate safety measures will assist in keeping you and your fellow Surveyors in the field all year long.

Information for this article was provided by Fireman's Fund Insurance Company and the Center for Disease Control. If you would like further information about Lyme disease visit the CDC's website: <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/lyme>. If you are a Fireman's Fund policyholder, feel free to contact your Fireman's Fund loss control consultant at 1-888-527-6872 or askus@ffic.com.

This article was written by Mark Amirault of the Klein Agency, LLC. The Klein Agency insures over 700 design professionals in the Mid-Atlantic with offices in MD and PA. They are frequent speakers at state associations and local chapters. If you have any questions please feel free to contact Mark Amirault at 410-832-7600 or mamirault@ekagency.com.