

**IMDM OUTER****VEGETATION CLEARANCE OPERATIONS – BLACKTHORN****INCIDENT**

On Tuesday 19th November 2019, contractors were tasked with cutting back vegetation in the Yeovil area. The task was to be completed with Chainsaws and the appropriate PPE for chainsaw use was provided. During the cutting of the vegetation, two operatives were struck by Blackthorn on the hands because the Chainsaw gloves, whilst chainsaw safe, were not puncture resistant.

Upon inspection of their hands, it could be clearly seen that swelling and redness was present. Aware of the dangers that Blackthorn can cause if not treated, the IPs were conveyed to Salisbury A + E. After seeing the specialists, antibiotics were administered and prescribed to both individuals who were then discharged.

DANGERS OF BLACKTHORN

A piece of blackthorn under the skin has the potential to cause swelling, pain, severe infection and blood poisoning. If left too long before treatment, amputation might be the result.

Blackthorns are covered in unpleasant bacteria. If you have a piece buried in your flesh, the best course of action is to get yourself to the hospital if you have a rapidly escalating and unpleasant reaction; don't leave it until the area around the wound turns black.

**WORKS PLANNING FOR VEGETATION CONTAINING THORN MATERIAL.**

Contact with vegetation material containing thorn is not uncommon within the forestry/vegetation management industry and although not a regular occurrence, thorn type injuries do happen and are a concern due to their innocuous beginning, but potential severe infection and tissue damage implications to the injured party.

To mitigate the risk of thorn type penetration injuries, the following points should be considered:

- Blackthorn generally grows as a bush but can grow to a tree up to 6 metres in height. The advantages of it are that the bush itself forms a significant boundary barrier and is used by wildlife providing food, shelter and nesting locations.
- Brief all operatives of the potential hazards of blackthorn and for individuals to check and monitor the condition of their PPE and to undertake pre-use checks.
- Use polesaws/extendable equipment to cut Blackthorn, therefore keeping the operator at a distance further away from the thorn containing material.
- Consider using mechanical devices such as mechanical flail or mulcher type equipment.
- If struck by Blackthorn, monitor the injury site and seek immediate medical attention.

Lesson Learnt

- The importance of understanding the risk from Blackthorn injury and seeking the right medical attention in a timely manner.