

DOUGLAS-FIR TUSSOCK MOTHS MAY CAUSE ALLERGIC REACTIONS

TUSSOCKOSIS

THE HAIRS ON THE TUSSOCK MOTH EGG MASSES, COCOONS, AND CATERPILLARS MAY CAUSE ALLERGIC REACTIONS IN SOME PEOPLE. SYMPTOMS MAY INCLUDE ITCHING, RASHES, WATERY EYES, RUNNY NOSE, COUGH, AND LESS COMMONLY, WHEEZING, SHORTNESS OF BREATH, AND CHEST TIGHTNESS.

In the Field - Wednesday, July 24th

A Youth Conservation Corps crew was working near Indian Mountain on the west side of the Payette National Forest when one crew member suffered a severe allergic reaction from a tussock moth caterpillar. The crew had been working in the trees all day and had set up camp in a clearing at 1700. Around 1800, the crew member complained about itching on his lower back. The crew lead checked and saw he had already had a severe rash (see photo). They assumed he had sat on a chair with a Tussock caterpillar climbing on it. They applied sting wipes to the crew member's back and gave him a Benadryl. At 2030 the crew met with a wildlife biologist for an evening project, and he took a look at 'one big welt' and confirmed it was probably caused by the caterpillars that were everywhere along the Middle Fork of the Weiser River that year. The crew member was feeling okay and the crew went to three survey sites. At 2300, the crew member reported his back was itching like crazy and he felt stinging and pain. The biologist knew the hairs could stick and make it worse, so they carefully wrapped the crew member's shirt in a plastic bag, used Betadine swabs to scrub the area, and applied triple antibiotic cream. A clean shirt and 2 additional Benadryl eased the itching slightly. Around 2400 the crew member was taken off the hill to the McCall Hospital for treatment, where the area was treated with a steroid cream and additional medications. The ER doctor was not familiar with the Tussock caterpillar or the reaction it causes. We have high numbers of these caterpillars in our area, so it is important to be educated on the potentially dangerous reactions before going out in the field!

Douglas-fir tussock moths are native to Idaho and commonly go through cycles of high populations lasting 3-4 years.

FEEDS ON: Douglas fir and true firs

LIFE CYCLE: One generation per year; the insect overwinters in an egg mass; caterpillars hatch from eggs at bud break and feed on needles throughout the early to mid-summer; adult male moths fly during mid-summer.

Clockwise: Adult male tussock moth, cocoons on a branch, and the skin reaction from the tussock caterpillar. By 1800, large welts had already formed.

