

Disaster Relief

Safety Precautions with Snakes

After a flood, storm, or hurricane, snakes are often forced into places where you don't usually find snakes. If you live in an area where poisonous snakes are common, take the following precautions:

- Be able to identify poisonous snakes common in your area.
- Be alert for snakes in unusual places. They may be found in or around homes, barns, outbuildings, driftwood, leaves, dikes, dams, stalled automobiles, piles of debris, building materials, trash or any type of rubble or shelter.
- Before beginning any clean-up or rescue operations, search thoroughly for snakes. They may be under or near any type of protective cover.
- In rescue or clean-up operations, wear heavy leather or rubber high-topped boots and heavy gloves. Wear trouser legs outside boots. Be extremely careful around debris. Use rakes, pry bars, or other long-handled tools when removing debris. Never expose your hands, feet or other parts of your body in a place where a snake might be.
- Do not work after dark in areas prone to have snakes.
- Explain to children the dangers of snakes under storm or flood conditions and the precautions they should follow. Do not let children play around debris.
- If you kill a poisonous snake, use a stick, rake, or other long-handled tool to carry the snake away for disposal.
- Snakes may bite even when they appear dead. Even when the snake is dead, venom is still viable, and if skin is broken with a fang, venom can enter the victim's system.
- If you realize you are near a snake, avoid sudden movement. Sudden movements may cause the snake to strike. If you remain still, the snake may leave. If the snake doesn't move away from you after a few minutes, slowly back away from it.
- If someone is bitten by a poisonous snake, take him or her to an emergency medical facility immediately. Keep the victim calm, warm, and reassured.

Controlling Snakes

To get rid of snakes in buildings and to prevent others from entering:

- Prune shrubs and trees so there is no ground-level vegetation.
- Remove snakes' food supply. Eliminating rats and mice from an area often discourages snakes.
- Remove snakes' hiding places. Get rid of lumber piles, trash piles, high weeds and grasses, dense vegetation, and debris.
- Block openings where snakes might enter buildings. Snakes can pass through extremely small openings and usually enter near or below ground level.
 - Be sure doors, windows, and screens fit tightly.
 - Search walls and floors for holes or crevices.
 - Inspect the masonry of foundations, fireplaces, and chimneys. Plug or cement cracks.
 - Plug spaces around pipes that go through outside walls.
 - Fasten galvanized screen over drains or ventilators or over large areas of loose construction.
- Be aware that most repellents are not effective.

Removing Snakes from Dwellings

Only 20 species of snakes native to the continental United States are venomous and a threat to humans and domestic animals. Still, some people are uneasy when any snake, poisonous or not, is nearby or inside a dwelling. Fortunately, there are ways to catch and release snakes without harm to humans or reptiles.

Glueboards

One recommended removal method uses a glueboard. This is simply a piece of wood with several rodent glue traps tacked to it. Individual glue traps are about 5 x 12 in (12.5 x 30 cm) and can be purchased in most hardware, pest control, and feed stores. Glueboards can be used in living areas, small crawl spaces, basements, garages, or outdoor storage sheds. This has been tested and proven to successfully hold 6-foot diamondback rattlesnakes.

Put the glueboard against a wall, because snakes tend to follow edges rather than cross open ground. When the snake moves across the board, it sticks to the glue. Don't put the board near pipes or furniture, to prevent the snake from getting leverage and pulling itself off. Glueboards also can trap small pets, so don't put them where pets or non-target wildlife species can reach them. Drill a hole in one corner of the board so you can retrieve it easily with a hook on a long pole. This lets you stay a good distance from the snake.

You may want to release captured nonvenomous snakes in your yard. You probably want to relocate venomous snakes far from your neighborhood. One of the best containers for transporting nonvenomous snakes is a pillowcase without holes or weak seams. To release a snake from the board, pour vegetable oil on it. The oil slowly breaks down the glue, and the snake eventually moves off the board. Some glue residue may stay on the snake for a while but will be shed with the old skin. Use only vegetable oil. Many other types, such as motor oil, are toxic to animals. Check the glueboards frequently, and do not leave snakes on them longer than absolutely necessary. The boards will not hold large snakes indefinitely.

Funnel Traps

Funnel traps are another way to remove snakes. Place these traps, commonly made from window screen, up against a wall in the room where you last saw the snake. Funnel traps are less effective than glue boards because snakes can crawl over, under, and around them and even escape once trapped. Prevent Future Entry After removing unwanted snakes, prevent future access for other snakes. Check around your home for holes in the foundation, in corners of doors and windows, and around water pipes. Seal off all openings that are 1¼ inch or larger.

Eliminating rodents from your home and yard reduces the food supply for snakes and makes your property less inviting for them. Eliminate all places where snakes and rodents might hide, including debris, underbrush, roofing tin, plywood, large appliances, car parts, and burrows in your yard. Chemicals, horse-hair, blood, or other substances have not been proven to repel snakes effectively.