

## Safety Share

In June 2010, while on an inspection at Savannah River, My wife Jennie, and my two daughters were watching a movie and heard a crackling sound. Jennie went over by the back door to see what the noise was and found nothing out-of-sorts.

About 20 minutes later there was a THUD!!! She looked over by the back door and saw a huge SNAKE!



There are two safety messages that come from this event. First, people have different perceptions of risk based on their background. Jennie grew up with a mother that wasn't afraid of snakes, and was frequently exposed to them, and even handled them. Recognizing this as a Black Rat Snake, she calmly walked over by the snake to put on her shoes, walked past the snake to the sink to put on the rubber gloves, and picked up the snake to put it outside where it belonged (not before telling my daughter to grab the camera of course). My daughters on the other hand reacted as many of us would (that is abject terror). According to my wife's account, they were standing on the furniture. So clearly our perception of risk could lead us to act unsafely (standing on the furniture) while experience and training can help us better understand the risks and act accordingly!

The second message is the analogy. Our house is a safety barrier, protecting us from the outside hazards. As with any safety barrier, we like to think that it is effective. But all barriers have holes. Hazards may slip through the barriers and remain unnoticed until they make themselves known, potentially with a Significant Emotional Event (or a loud Thud!). Someone gets injured or even killed. Obviously there was a hole in my safety barrier (house) that I hadn't found or filled. We believe the snake had been in the house for quite a while, based on the lack of mice this winter. Without constant vigilance to maintain or improve our safety barriers, we can be lulled into a false sense of safety (complacency). We must be constantly looking for the holes that develop, and work to fill them.