



Snakes after a Disaster

Publication Number 490-317, August 1996

General

Many snakes, like other residents in the path of a major storm, have been displaced and left homeless. As a result, it is common to find these animals seeking shelter and food in areas close to people. Some of these areas include the inside of houses, storage sheds, barns, and other buildings. Damaged structures have a higher probability of attracting snakes due to the many accessible entrances. In addition, displaced snakes may also be found under debris scattered by the storm or in debris piles created during the cleanup effort.

In the South there are many more species of nonpoisonous snakes than poisonous snakes. It's important to realize that both poisonous and nonpoisonous snakes are beneficial to people through keeping rodent populations down. Since rodents are also displaced by storms, this is especially important.

Tips

Outdoors:

- Watch where you put your hands and feet when removing or cleaning debris. If possible, don't put your fingers under debris you intend to move.
- Wear snake-proof boots at least 10 inches high and/or snake leggings in heavy debris areas where snakes are likely to be found.
- Never step over logs or other obstacles unless you can see the other side.
- Watch for snakes sunning on fallen trees, limbs, and other debris.
- If you encounter a snake, step back and allow the animal to proceed on its way. Snakes are usually not fast-moving animals and a person can easily retreat from the snake's path.

Indoors:

If you find a snake in your house, try to isolate the snake within a small area of the house.

- Nonpoisonous snakes can be captured by pinning the snake down with a long stick or pole, preferably forked at one end, and then removed by scooping up with a snow shovel or flat-blade shovel.
- If you are uncomfortable about removing the snake yourself, seek someone within the community who has experience handling snakes who could do an effective job for you. A good starting point is your local wildlife conservation officer or sheriff's department.
- As a last resort, you may need to kill a poisonous snake. Club it with a long stick, rod, or other tool. Never attempt to kill a poisonous snake with an instrument that brings you within the snake's striking range (usually estimated at

less than one-half the total length of the snake).

- All openings around the house 1/4 inch and larger should be sealed to exclude snakes. Check areas such as corners of doors and windows, around water pipes, and electrical service entrances. Holes in masonry foundations should be sealed with mortar to exclude snakes. Holes in wooden buildings can be sealed with fine 1/8-inch mesh hardware cloth and/or sheet metal.
- Remove debris from around the house as soon as possible. The debris attracts rodents that snakes feed on and also provides shelter for the snakes. Vegetation around the house should be kept closely mowed.
- No legal toxicants or fumigants kill snakes. Repellents and traps work with limited success.
- If you are bitten by a poisonous snake, don't try to treat the bite yourself. Go to the nearest hospital for treatment immediately. Try to make a mental note of the appearance of the snake for identification and treatment purposes.
- Learn to identify nonpoisonous and poisonous snakes. Information on snake identification can be obtained from your county Extension office or from your state's wildlife department.

Based on information developed by Clemson Cooperative Extension following Hurricane Hugo. Revised for Virginia audiences by Virginia Cooperative Extension.

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