Controlling Snakes After the Storm or Flood

Robert A. Pierce II
Extension Fish and Wildlife Specialist
The School of Natural Resources

Many snakes, like other residents in the path of storms and floods, have been displaced and left homeless. As a result, many of these animals are seeking shelter and food in areas close to people. These areas, out of the way of high water, include the inside of homes, storage sheds, barns and other buildings. Damaged structures have a higher probability of attracting snakes because of the many accessible entrances. In addition, displaced snakes may be found under debris scattered by the flood or in debris piles created during the cleanup effort.

In Missouri, 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, because they keep the rodent populations down. Since rodents are also displaced by flooding conditions, this is especially important.

Control Tips

Outdoors

♥ Watch where you place your hands and feet when removing or cleaning debris. If possible, don’t place your fingers under debris you intend to move.

♥ Wear snake-proof boots at least 10 inches high 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.

♥ If you encounter a snake, step back and allow it to proceed on its way. Snakes usually do not move fast, and a person can easily retreat back from its path.

Indoors

♥ If you find a snake in your home, try to isolate it within a room or small area.

♥ 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 them up with a flat-blade shovel.

♥ If you are uncomfortable about removing the snake yourself, seek someone within the community who has experience handling snakes to do it for you. A good starting point is your local animal control shelter 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 such as a garden hoe. Never try 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).

• Exclude snakes from your home by sealing all openings ¼-inch and larger. Check areas such as the corners of doors and windows, around water pipes and electrical service entrances. Holes in masonry foundations should be sealed with mortar. Holes in wooden buildings can be sealed with fine ⅛-inch mesh hardware cloth or sheet metal.

• Make your yard unattractive to snakes. Remove debris from around the home as soon as possible. This attracts rodents that snakes feed on and also provides shelter for snakes. Vegetation around the home should be kept closely mowed.

• No legal toxicants or fumigants are registered to control snakes. Repellents are available but are not effective.

• If you are bitten by a poisonous snake, don’t try to treat the bite yourself. Go to the nearest hospital for treatment immediately. If the bite breaks the skin, even nonpoisonous snakes can cause infections, so seek medical attention.

• Learn to identify nonpoisonous and poisonous snakes. Information on snake identification can be obtained from the Missouri Department of Conservation.

SOURCE: MU 1993 FLOOD RELIEF REPORT
Published by
UNIVERSITY EXTENSION, UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-COLUMBIA