

Controlling Snakes After a Storm or Flood

Snakes often become displaced after a storm or flooding event. 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. Displaced snakes may be found under debris scattered by the flood or in debris piles created during the cleanup effort.

Missouri has many more species of nonvenomous snakes than venomous snakes. Both venomous and nonvenomous snakes are beneficial to people because they keep down rodent populations. Because rodents also are displaced by flooding, this is especially important.

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 easily can retreat from its path.

Indoors

- Try to isolate the snake within a room or small area.
- Capture nonvenomous snakes by pinning them down with a long stick or pole, preferably forked at one end, and then remove by scooping them up with a flat-blade shovel.
- If you are uncomfortable removing the snake yourself, seek someone in the community who has experience handling snakes. A good starting point is your local animal control shelter or sheriff's department.

- As a last resort, you may need to kill a venomous snake. Club it with a long stick, rod or other tool such as a garden hoe. Never try to kill a venomous snake with an instrument that brings you within the snake's striking range — usually estimated at less than half the total length of the snake.
- Exclude snakes from your home by sealing 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 by removing 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 generally are not an effective means for preventing snakes from entering an area.
- Learn to identify nonvenomous and venomous snakes. Information on snake identification can be obtained from the Missouri Department of Conservation, <http://mdc.mo.gov>.
- If you are bitten by a venomous snake, don't try to treat the bite yourself. Go to the nearest hospital for treatment immediately. If the bite breaks the skin, even nonvenomous snakes can cause infections, so seek medical attention.

For more information on controlling nuisance snakes, contact the MU Extension Center in your county.

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