



## SAFETY / ENVIRONMENTAL TOOLBOX TRAINING – HAZARDS TO OUTDOOR WORKERS – SNAKES

### SUPERVISOR INSTRUCTIONS:

- Use toolbox trainings to encourage safety / environmental discussions during monthly meetings with employees
- Submit the employee sign-in sheet to your designated administrative assistant /training coordinator as a record of training



Snakes are important predators within the ecosystem, typically feeding on rodents, birds and insects. These reptiles are cold-blooded and must rely on external heat sources to regulate their body temperature. Therefore, during the hottest part of the day, it is not uncommon to find snakes coiled in tall grass, lying in moist brush or camouflaged in cool woodland areas. Of course, this can be especially dangerous for outdoor workers that may wander right into their path or accidentally disturb them in the course of performing their job duties. Outdoor workers, including groundskeepers,

painters, custodial workers, mechanics, or any other worker who spends time outside should learn how to recognize the various snake species, how to avoid exposure to snakes and how to respond in case someone is bitten.

### How to Identify a Venomous Snake?

In Georgia there are 41 native species of snakes, but only 6 of them are venomous:

- 🐍 Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake;
- 🐍 Timber Rattlesnake (or Canebrake);
- 🐍 Pigmy Rattlesnake;
- 🐍 Eastern Coral Snake;
- 🐍 Cottonmouth (or Water Moccasin);
- 🐍 Copperhead



Coral snake

However, some of the most frequently observed snakes include many non-poisonous snakes, such as: black racers, rat snakes, and nonvenomous water snakes. Unfortunately, when a snake is encountered many people are frightened; they automatically think that the snake is poisonous and try to kill it. But beware – ***It is illegal for a person to kill a non-venomous snake in Georgia!*** According to wildlife biologist John Jensen, the best course of action for a novice to determine if a snake is dangerous is to become familiar with the patterns and colors of the venomous snakes.

- Except for the Coral Snake, venomous snakes are most commonly identified by their triangular-shaped head;
- Three of the six venomous snakes in Georgia have rattles at the tip of their tails (Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake, Timber



JD Willson

[Copperhead](#)

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Rattlesnake, and Pigmy Rattlesnake) and only one has bright colors (Coral Snake).

- One has light brown or grey background with darker brown hourglass or saddleback shapes across its back and a solid-colored “copper” head (Copperhead).
- One has a very white mouth that is “gaped” open in a defensive position and cannot flee from threatening situations (Cottonmouth).



[Cottonmouth](#)

### Prevention and Protection



[Timber Rattlesnake](#)

Many snake species use camouflage to protect themselves from predators or as a method of catching their prey. It is wise to use caution when navigating in moist debris, woodland areas, or near bodies of water, as these are typical habitats of snakes during the summer. You may also encounter snakes when moving through transient habitats or during breeding season during spring and fall. Be alert, because accidentally stepping on a snake may communicate that you are trying to harm it, resulting in an aggressive response. Most of the time, however, snakes are more scared of you, than you are of them, and they will try and get away – fast! Here are some simple methods to keep yourself safe around snakes:

#### 1. WATCH YOUR STEP AND YOUR REACH

- NEVER place your hands or arms into areas blindly; and use a flashlight, when necessary.
- NEVER attempt to grab and/or pick up a snake. They will almost always strike at you!
- ALWAYS wear closed-toe shoes and long pants when walking through woods or places where you won't have clear views of where you step.



[Pigmy Rattlesnake](#)

#### 2. KEEP PEDESTRIAN AND WORK AREAS CLEAR OF DEBRIS AND WOOD

- Use gloves when disturbing wood piles, debris, or other cool, moist areas during daylight hours.
- Watch your step next to wood piles and around the crevices between the wood.
- Walk around logs instead of blindly stepping over them.

#### 3. REMAIN CALM AND LEAVE THEM ALONE

- If you see a snake, maintain a safe distance (> 6 feet); simply step back, let it pass or just leave it alone. Keep in mind that most snake bites occur when people try to capture or kill them.
- Do not attempt to nudge a snake to move on its way – the snake may consider this action a threat and react accordingly!

#### 4. EDUCATE YOURSELF AND BE PREPARED

- Familiarize yourself with local venomous and nonvenomous snakes – for more information go to: [www.uga.edu/srelherp](http://www.uga.edu/srelherp).
- Use caution when working in habitats that may be abundant with insects, fish, amphibians, birds, rodents, small reptiles, as these are the primary food items of most snakes. Many snake species are essential predators that control rodents and other pests.

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### In Case of a Snake Bite

Most people know that they were bitten by a snake, most likely because they were handling the snake or tried to pick it up. However, if a person is walking in water or tall grass, they may not realize that they were bitten and may think it is another kind of bite or scratch. ***Know the signs of snake bites!***

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), depending on the type of snake, the signs and symptoms may include:

- A pair of puncture marks at the wound
- Redness and swelling around the bite
- Severe pain at the site of the bite
- Nausea and vomiting
- Labored breathing (in extreme cases, breathing may stop altogether)
- Disturbed vision
- Increased salivation and sweating
- Numbness or tingling around your face and/or limbs



[Eastern Diamondback Rattlesnake](#)

### **If You or Someone Else is Bitten by a Snake:**

If you or someone else is bitten by a snake, the most important thing to do is to keep the person calm and follow these procedures:

- Reduce physical exertion of the victim - Keep the bitten person still and calm. This can slow down the spread of venom if the snake is poisonous.
- **Contact local emergency services** and let them know that you have a snakebite victim:
  - **At Emory University (Main Campus, Briarcliff Campus or Clairmont Campus) in Decatur, GA, dial 911 from any campus phone or cell phone for Dekalb County Emergency Medical Service (EMS).**
  - **At Emory University (Oxford Campus) in Oxford, GA, dial 911 from any campus phone or cell phone for Newton County EMS.**
- Remove any jewelry or watches from the affected area, in case of swelling.
- Lay or sit the person down with the bite below the level of the heart.
- **DO NOT** cut or ice the affected area or use constricting bands or tourniquets.
- If possible, remember the snake's shape/size and appearance (pattern) or take a digital (or cell phone) photo, as this may prove helpful during medical treatment – **DO NOT** try to capture or kill the snake.
- If you have a sterile, dry dressing – cover the bite.
- Remain calm and await emergency assistance.



[Coral Snake](#)

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### Questions for Discussion

- 1) You are most likely to encounter snakes when:
  - a) They are crossing roads or moving through transient habitats
  - b) They are basking near habitat edges (e.g. water bodies, forested areas)
  - c) During breeding season (e.g. fall and spring)
  - d) **All of the above**
  
- 2) The best way to protect yourself from getting bitten by a snake is:
  - a) **Use common sense and leave them alone**
  - b) Wear boots
  - c) Be as quiet as possible
  - d) None of the above
  
- 3) If someone is bitten by a snake, what is the best thing you can do to help them?
  - a) Help them walk or drive to the nearest medical facility
  - b) Try to suck out the poison
  - c) **Keep them calm and call for Emergency Services**
  - d) Capture the snake for medical staff

### CREDITS

<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/snakes/>  
<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/disasters/pdf/snakebite.pdf>

<http://srelherp.uga.edu/snakes/snake-safety.htm>  
<http://srelherp.uga.edu/snakes/safety/SnakeSafetyGeneral.pdf>

Six venomous snakes in Georgia easy to avoid, Posted: July 29, 2010 - 7:48am, By Noell Barnidge, <http://savannahnow.com/sports/2010-07-29/six-venomous-snakes-georgia-easy-avoid>, July 1, 2013.

