

PROCEDURES FOR “SNAKE INCIDENTS”

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I. INTRODUCTION

Each year Department members are dispatched to incidents involving snakes. The brush areas of the City provide a natural environment for several varieties of snakes. The following information is submitted for guidance and is not intended to replace ingenuity and common sense of members.

II. IDENTIFICATION

One of the primary objectives of snake incidents is to identify the type of snake you're dealing with as either "poisonous" or "non-poisonous".

A. POISONOUS SNAKES

Rattlesnakes are the only poisonous snakes native to this area and found within the City boundaries. They belong to the pit viper family, have flat triangular heads (somewhat like an arrowhead), and eyes with elliptical and catlike pupils. The head has a deep depression (the pit) midway between, but below the level of the eye and nostril. The head also contains the venomous fangs. Adult rattlesnakes generally have rattles at the point of the tail, which may make them easily identifiable. Immature snakes will have a button in lieu of rattles. The body color may be brown, grayish, greenish or black. Markings across the back and at the sides are a paler hue and may appear to form diamonds or lozenges on the back.

B. NON-POISONOUS SNAKES

The head of a non-poisonous snake generally features a blunt nose, straight sides to head, round eyes and pupils, and they are without fangs, pits or rattles. The colors vary from bright to dull.

III. DISPOSAL OF RATTLESNAKES

Decapitation is the simplest, easiest, and least expensive method to kill the snake. The long handled square point shovel is the recommended

tool for this purpose, and provides sufficient clearance (4') between you and the snake.

The head should be placed in a metal or plastic receptacle while transporting to a location suitable for disposal. Caution: Venom can still be injected into your body if fangs puncture your skin; up to one hour after decapitation, the rattlesnake reflexes still cause the head to strike and inject venom.

The head should be disposed of by burying in a hole a minimum of 24" deep and a safe distance from any residential area. The remainder of the snake can be disposed of by placing it in a trash container for routine pick-up. If possible, wrap the body in plastic or foil to prevent odor.

IV. MANAGEMENT OF SNAKE BITES*

- A. Reassure the patient
- B. Draw a circle around the affected area and note the time of the bite
- C. Immobilize the affected extremity in a dependent position
- D. Treat the patient for shock
- E. Administer an intravenous line (ALS units)
- F. Transport to the closest Most Accessible Receiving (MAR) emergency room

NOTE: Constricting bands, ice application, incision or suction is not used in the treatment of snakebites.

*References

1. Mosby's Paramedic Text Book, 1995
2. Los Angeles County Paramedic Training Institute syllabus, April 2000

V. HOW TO HANDLE REPORTED RATTLESNAKE INCIDENT

A. Outside of a structure and in the open

1. Maintain a distance from the snake at least equal to the length of its body
2. Capture the snake's head by pinning it between the ground and a square point shovel or pike pole
3. Decapitate the snake, using square point of shovel
4. Using a shovel, pick up the head and carcass and dispose of properly.

B. Outside of a structure and in brush or ivy

1. Do not search out snakes that are not a real threat to the home owner
2. Explain that it is not our policy to search out snakes in the brush or ivy and inform the owner or occupant to notify the Department if the snake returns to the open.

C. Inside of a structure

1. Remove the snake from the structure. This can be accomplished by using a pike pole and placing the snake into a tall trash can with a lid
2. Once the snake is removed from the structure, dispatch as indicated in A above.

D. Inside structure, but hiding

1. Use EXTREME caution in locating the snake
2. Use full personal protective gear (turnouts and gloves). Consider using gauntlet gloves over firefighting gloves
3. CO2 can be used to drive the snake from its hiding place or to immobilize the snake.

NOTE: Rattlesnakes can travel fast. Always give them a way out. They will take the path of least resistance. Bring tools in behind the snake and direct the snake where you want it to go.