

Safety Talk

Venomous Snakes

According to the CDC there are 4 groups of venomous snakes in the US: rattlesnakes, copperheads, cottonmouths or water moccasins and coral snakes. Although death rarely occurs from these bites, it's important to seek medical treatment.

There are about 30 different types of rattlesnakes in the US. Although they vary greatly in size, coloring and temperament, they are the largest of the venomous snakes. They have the ability to strike (or bite) at up to 1/3 their body length. Most rattlesnakes can be found sunning themselves near logs, on boulders or open areas and will use their tails or rattles as a warning if they feel threatened. They are found in virtually every state in many different habitats including mountains, prairies, deserts and beaches.

Copperheads are most likely to be found in forests, rocky areas, swamps or near lakes and rivers in the eastern states but can be found as far west as Texas. Their body color varies from reddish to a golden tan with hourglass shaped bands across the body. Adults will grow to 18 to 36 inches long with a nonaggressive temperament and will often freeze when startled. Most bites occur when the snake is unknowingly stepped on or near.

Cottonmouths, also called water moccasins, are large (50-55 inches long) with dark tan, brown or nearly black skin with vague black or dark brown cross-bands. Young cottonmouths have bold cross-bands of brown or orange with a yellow tail. This snake doesn't scare easily and will readily defend itself. They are found in the southeastern states in and around wetland areas, rivers and lakes.

Coral snakes have bright bands of yellow, red and black causing it to be confused with the non-venomous Scarlet King snake or Milk snake. To tell the differences between them remember "red and yellow can kill a fella; red and black is a friend of Jack". Thankfully this highly venomous snake is very shy preferring to hide in leaf piles or burrow into the ground. They live in wooded, sandy or marsh areas of the southern US.

When working in areas known to have venomous snakes, it's important to know ways to protect yourself. Snakes are most active in warm weather and many times can be found sunning themselves on flat surfaces. Don't try to handle a snake even if you think you know what kind it is, most snakes will bite when threatened and even if not venomous, the bite can be very painful. Wearing boots, gloves and long pants when working outside can also help prevent snake bites. Occasionally, prevention isn't enough and a worker will get bitten. Some things to do include:

- Try to remember what the snake looked like
- Seek professional medical attention immediately
- Try to keep still and calm, this helps to slow the spread of the venom
- Apply first aid if the hospital is far

- Lay down or sit with bite below heart level
- Wash the bite with soap and water, cover the bite with a clean dry dressing

Do **NOT** do the following:

- Do not wait for symptoms to occur, seek immediate medical attention
- Do not apply a tourniquet
- Do not slash the wound with a knife, suck out venom or apply ice
- Do not drink alcohol as a painkiller
- Do not drink caffeinated beverages.

Discussion Questions

Why can't you drink alcohol for the pain of a snake bite?

Which of the venomous snakes is the most widespread in the US?

MEETING / TRAINING ATTENDANCE ROSTER

COMPANY: _____

_____ SAFETY MEETING

JOB/DEPT: _____

_____ SAFETY TRAINING

DATE: ___/___/___

TIME: _____

TOPICS ADDRESSED: _____

EMPLOYEE'S SIGNATURES

_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

EMPLOYEE SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: _____

ACTION TAKEN: _____

Supervisor's Signature

_____/_____/_____
Date

Safety Coordinator's Signature

_____/_____/_____
Date