

# Snakes and Flooding

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Natural disasters cause many species of wildlife to leave the affected area in search of a new home. Floods that occur after heavy rainfalls commonly displace snakes. As these snakes try to find food and shelter, people working in and around damaged buildings are more likely to encounter them. The following tips will help you safely and legally deal with snakes after a flood.

## General tips

- Most snakes in Texas are not venomous! Learn to identify your local snakes.
- Snakes benefit humans by controlling rodents. Rodents will also be displaced by flood waters, and snakes are likely to seek them for food.
- If you are bitten by a venomous snake, go to the nearest hospital immediately. There are no effective home remedies for snakebites.
- If you are bitten by a nonvenomous snake, wash the wound thoroughly. If the bite broke the skin and swelling occurs or bleeding continues, seek medical attention.

## Outside

- Watch where you put your hands and feet.
  - Use a shovel or other tool to flip debris before lifting with your hands.
  - Do not step over debris when you cannot see the other side.



Most Texas snakes, like this Texas rat snake (*Elaphe obsoleta*), are not venomous and try to avoid people.

- If you encounter a snake, step back and wait for it to leave the area.
  - Most snakes move slowly and try to avoid humans.
- Snakes are likely to seek shelter in debris piles and downed trees.
  - Watch where you reach—some snakes may take shelter in overhead debris.
  - Wear work gloves—many snakes can puncture through work gloves, but this extra layer of protection can reduce the severity of a bite.
  - Wear boots at least 10 inches high, or snake-proof boots or leggings, in areas with widespread debris.
  - Snakes will often rest on top of debris piles to warm themselves in the sun.

- Make your yard unattractive to snakes by removing debris as soon as possible.
  - Start by removing debris close to the house.
  - Once debris is removed, mow the lawn and trim back all vegetation.

## Inside

- Seal all openings larger than 1/8 inch.
  - Check the corners of doors and windows, around water pipes and electrical service entrances, and the foundation.
  - Use sheet metal or 1/8-inch hardware cloth to cover openings.
- If you find a nonvenomous snake in the house, it simply wants to get outside.
  - Keep an eye on the snake so you do not have to rediscover its location.
  - Clear a path from the snake to the outside and sweep the snake outside with a long-handled broom.
  - You can use a long-handled tool, such as a shovel, to lift the snake off the ground and carry it outside. Snakes are less mobile once they are lifted off the ground.
  - Several species of nonvenomous snakes are state-listed as threatened, so it is illegal to kill them. Avoid killing all nonvenomous snakes—they are not a threat to humans.

- If you find a venomous snake in the house, animal control or pest removal companies may be able to help, but may not be available during or right after major natural disasters.
- As a last resort, you may need to kill a venomous snake. It is against state law to kill timber rattlesnakes. Other venomous snakes can be legally killed in Texas.
  - You can hurt yourself or others, or damage property, when trying to kill a snake with a tool. Consider your surroundings and be careful.
  - Use a long-handled tool, such as a garden hoe, to strike the snake in the head. Make sure the tool keeps you out of striking distance of the snake (about half its body length). Follow through with the strike. Do not jerk the tool back after striking as this may throw the snake.
  - Remove the carcass carefully with a tool, not by hand.
  - If you don't have a long-handled tool, wait until help can arrive.
- There are no legal toxicants or fumigants for snakes. Repellants for snake can be purchased, but are unlikely to be effective in the conditions after a flood.

*For more resources on snakes, post-disaster cleanup, and other wildlife, contact your local County Extension office.*

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