

Guide to Safely Relocating Rattlesnakes



Rattlesnakes sometimes forage in agricultural areas which can result in work stoppage, safety concerns and, in some cases, snake mortality. The BC Wildlife Act prevents the killing, harassment, and capture of most wildlife, including snakes, without a permit. The responsible relocation of rattlesnakes by agricultural producers is being recognized by Conservation Officers as a necessary management practice that contributes to the conservation of the species. Western Rattlesnakes are listed as Threatened in Canada under the Species at Risk Act, which protects this species on Federal Lands. *It is not necessary to relocate other non-venomous snake species unless they are at risk.*

Response Protocol

Consider having at least one person on your site trained to be able to relocate snakes. For further information on training contact the Okanagan Similkameen Conservation Alliance outreach@osca.org.

- 1 Proper equipment and employee training is recommended before relocating rattlesnakes.
- 2 Once a rattlesnake that needs to be relocated is identified, have the snake monitored at a safe distance (at least 2-3 metres). The further the observer is from the snake, the more relaxed it will be and less likely to flee or get into a location where capture is difficult. The monitor ensures that no one else comes into contact with the snake and it can be easily located when the response person arrives. If the snake has moved into an area that compromises your safety, such as under a house or crawl space, do not attempt to capture the snake. Wait until capture can be done safely.
- 3 Maintain a safe buffer zone with other people and pets kept at least 5 m away. This will eliminate the chance that the snake may strike at someone while being placed into the carrying container and will ensure that people do not agitate the snake by being too close. While moving the rattlesnake, the response person is responsible for the safety of others in the area.

Recommended Equipment

- A snake hook or snake tongs with a gentle grip and long handle (available at www.tongs.com). A rake handle or broom can also be used but be gentle since snakes are easily injured.
- A container to carry the snake such as a full-size plastic garbage can with handles and a securable lid. A light coloured container that will not absorb heat with added small vent holes in the lid is ideal. The container should be clearly labelled for safety, "Live Rattlesnake".

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- 4 A rattlesnake may become alarmed if it is approached in the open. Before approaching the snake, if possible, conceal your presence with cover objects (i.e. shrubs and other obstacles like the snake relocating container) to help reduce the chance that the snake may become alarmed or aggressive. Always stay out of the strike zone of the rattlesnake. If coiled, the rattlesnake may strike at $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of its body length. If the rattlesnake is stretched out, the strike zone is smaller.
- 5 If the snake is agitated, it can be difficult to capture and relocate, often becoming more likely to strike at an approaching threat. If so, cease all movement until the snake is relaxed, thereby reducing the risk. While approaching the snake, move in a slow, smooth manner. If using tongs, grip the snake in the middle of the body with as little pressure as possible. If the tongs have an interlocking tooth, be aware of the tooth's position relative to the snake's body so the tooth does not pin the snake causing bodily injury (snake organs can be easily damaged). If using a snake hook or long handle, slide the hook under the snake one-third of the way from the head and gently lift up.
- 6 Carefully place the snake in the already opened carrying container. Quickly replace the lid, ensuring that it is securely sealed. Apply extra securement to the lid with a bungee cord or duct tape to ensure the lid does not accidentally open. Place the container within view, away from people and in the shade, while getting ready to relocate the snake. The container should be clearly labelled "Live Rattlesnake: do not disturb" and should not be kept on view. The rattlesnake should be released at a safe location with a few hours of capture.
- 7 When ready to depart, double check that the lid is properly secured, then secure the container in the vehicle with cords or a seatbelt. In the fall, relocate the rattlesnake on the nearest rugged hillside where a den is likely to occur, no further than 1 km away. In the spring and summer relocate the rattlesnake within 500 meters of the capture location and away from roadways and developed areas where it could come into human conflict. Release the snake by carefully removing the lid and gently tipping the container away from you onto the ground, maintaining the container as a safety barrier. The tongs can be used to remove the lid and hold the handle while the snake exits the container. Or the open container can be gently laid on its side.



Emergency Response **Guidelines for a Rattlesnake** **Bite**

In the event that a person is bitten, ensure that the injured person remains calm and have someone monitor the snake so that no one else is bitten. Reassure the person that rattlesnake bites are not fatal and usually leave no long-term effects if treatment provided quickly. ***Do not kill the snake. Killing the snake and bringing it to the hospital is illegal and adds further hazard to the situation.***

- 1 **Never apply a tourniquet** or make incisions to the area, or suck blood from the wound. This makes the injury worse.
- 2 **Call the nearest hospital** as soon as possible to allow the staff to make any necessary preparations.
- 3 **Drive the injured person to the nearest hospital immediately** and continue to encourage calmness. The injured person must never drive.

**For further information go to www.osca.org
or contact outreach@osca.org**