

RANCHO SANTA FE
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FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT
Rancho Santa Fe, California 92067-0410

Firehouse Focus

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 19, 2007

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“Snakes. Why’d it have to be snakes?”

RANCHO SANTA FE, Calif. — Living in Southern California means sunny skies, warm temperatures, and lots of open space. Such a climate also means living with rattlesnakes. While the idea of sharing being anywhere near a snake strikes fear in many people, it is possible to co-exist. The more you know about snakes, the better prepared you will be for any potential encounters.

How Can Rattlesnakes Be Identified?

Rattlesnakes have a powerful body, thin neck, and a well-defined triangular or arrow-shaped head. In comparison, a non-poisonous snake tends to look more like a snake a child rolls out of clay: the head, neck and body have more-or-less the same diameter. (*Please note: This is true only of snakes native to California and does not apply to exotic snakes or snakes imported into California from elsewhere.*)

What Types of Snakes Are Common in San Diego County?

There are four species of rattlesnakes found in San Diego County. The most common species is the Southern Pacific rattlesnake, which can be found in prairie or sage scrub areas as well as housing developments, parks, and even the beach. The Red Diamond rattlesnake is the largest species in the county and prefers to live away from developed areas; however, as communities spread into open land, sightings are becoming more common. Southwestern Speckled rattlesnakes are very shy and avoid populated areas, making them the least common species to be seen in Southern California. Found only in the desert, the Colorado Desert Sidewinder is the smallest species in the area. Photos of these species can be found on our website at www.rsffire.org/safety/rattlesnake.asp.

What If I See a Snake?

If you see a snake, the best thing to do is leave it alone! Do not attempt to touch it or pick it up. If you are in an open or wilderness area, let the snake be. That is its home. If the snake is near your house, especially if you have children or animals, you can call your local fire department or animal control agency to come and remove the snake for you. If you live within the Rancho Santa Fe Fire Protection District, you can call the North County Dispatch non-emergency number at 858-756-1126 and they will send help your way.

What Can Be Done to Prevent A Bite?

Hands, feet, and ankles are the most common sites for rattlesnake bites. Using some common sense rules can prevent most snake bites.

- Never go barefooted or wear sandals when walking in the rough.
- Always stay on paths.
- Always look for concealed snakes before picking up rocks, sticks or firewood.
- Always check carefully around stumps or logs before sitting.
- When climbing, always look before putting your hands in a new location.
- Never grab "sticks" or "branches" while swimming. Rattlesnakes are excellent swimmers.
- Teach children to respect snakes and to leave snakes alone.
- Always give snakes the right of way!

What If Someone Is Bitten?

A snakebite emergency plan should be developed before it is needed. Initial treatment is relatively simple:

- Call 9-1-1 immediately!
- Try to calm the victim.
- Gently wash the area with soap and water.
- Apply a cold, wet cloth over the bite.

There are several things that should NOT be done as they will not help and can actually be more dangerous to the victim:

- DO NOT apply a tourniquet.
- DO NOT pack the bite area in ice.
- DO NOT cut the wound with a knife or razor.
- DO NOT use your mouth to suck out the venom.
- DO NOT let the victim drink alcohol.

For more information on rattlesnakes and other safety issues, please visit our website at www.rsffire.org.

The mission of the Rancho Santa Fe Fire Protection District is "To protect life, property, and environment through prevention, preparedness, education and emergency response." Formed in 1946, the Fire District now spans approximately 42-square miles and protects over 21,000 citizens. The Fire District currently operates out of four full-time fire stations and serves the communities within and surrounding Rancho Santa Fe and 4S-Ranch.

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