

SNAKE BITE PREVENTION IN AGRICULTURE

*A Risk Management Resource for Safer
Operations*



INTRODUCTION

In agriculture, injury risks often bring to mind tractors, machinery and weather. But for field workers, equipment operators, and ranch hands, one threat can quietly slither unnoticed: **venomous snakes**.

Across the U.S., thousands of snake bites occur annually — and many happen in outdoor occupations. A bite from a rattlesnake or cottonmouth can be life-threatening and career-disrupting. For employers, it means costly medical claims, operational downtime and liability exposure.

Snakes are part of the environment. But with smart safety practices, snake bites don't have to be part of the job.

WHY A SNAKE BITE PREVENTION PROGRAM IS GOOD RISK MANAGEMENT

Protects Worker Safety and Lives

- Bites can cause serious tissue damage, permanent disability or even death. Prevention reduces exposure while improving emergency response.

Prevents Downtime and Work Interruptions

- An incident in the field can halt entire crews and throw production off schedule, especially during critical planting or harvesting windows.

Controls Insurance Costs and Improves Mod Scores

- Lower incident rates can reduce workers' compensation claims and keep insurance premiums in check.

Demonstrates OSHA Compliance

- A formal plan for managing environmental hazards like snakes supports regulatory readiness and avoids penalties.



The [CDC estimates](#) that **7,000–8,000 people** are bitten by venomous snakes each year in the U.S.

THE FACTS: SNAKE BITES AND WORKPLACE EXPOSURE

- While an average of **five to six deaths** typically occur, **many bites lead to permanent injury, surgery or hospitalization.**
- Most bites happen in **rural and agricultural environments**, particularly in the Southeast and Southwest regions.
- Common culprits: **rattlesnakes, copperheads, cottonmouths and coral snakes.**

(Source: CDC – [NIOSH Science Blog](#))

SAFETY ACTION PLAN

1. Train Workers on Snake Awareness

- Recognize local snake species and typical habitats.
- Understand that snakes may hide under tarps, debris piles, tall grass, wood stacks or equipment.
- Conduct seasonal safety briefings — especially in warmer months.

2. Use Protective Clothing

- Boots at least 10 inches high are strongly recommended.
- Heavy gloves should be worn when clearing debris or handling stored material.
- Long pants and gaiters offer added protection.



3. Follow These Best Practices (OSHA & CDC Guidance)

DO

- Do watch where you place hands and feet.
- Do step back if you see a snake. Let it pass.
- Do note the snake's color and head shape if a bite occurs — it helps with treatment.
- Do keep the bite below heart level. Keep the person calm and still.

DO NOT

- Do NOT put fingers under debris blindly.
- Do NOT try to catch or kill the snake.
- Do NOT cut the wound or attempt to suck out the venom.
- Do NOT apply a tourniquet or ice.
- Do NOT delay — seek immediate medical attention.

4. Environmental Controls

- Keep work areas mowed and clear of brush.
- Remove piles of lumber, rocks and debris where snakes can shelter.
- Post signs in high-risk areas and routes.
- Use fencing or barriers around housing, storage or other buildings.

5. Emergency Preparedness

- Train foremen and crew leads in first aid for snake bites.
- Keep emergency contact numbers and directions to the nearest hospital on hand.
- Establish a mobile communication protocol (radio or phone) in remote fields.
- Encourage workers to use a "buddy system" in high-risk areas.



RESPONSE PROTOCOL: IF A WORKER IS BITTEN

1. **Call for medical help immediately.**
2. **Keep the person calm and still** — movement increases venom spread.
3. **Immobilize the bite area**, keeping it **below the level of the heart**.
4. **Do NOT cut the wound, apply ice, or try to suck out venom.**
5. **Cover with a clean, dry dressing.**
6. **Try to identify the snake** (color, size, head shape), but do not endanger others trying to catch it.

CONCLUSION: REDUCE THE BITE RISK, INCREASE SAFETY CONFIDENCE

For agriculture businesses, snake bite prevention is about more than avoiding rare incidents — it's about controlling risk where nature and labor intersect. Whether clearing brush, irrigating fields or moving livestock, workers deserve a clear plan and the right gear to stay safe.

Snake safety is smart risk management. It protects your team, your bottom line and your business reputation.

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