**Summer Snake Safety**

*Compiled by “Ranger Frank” Hoffman, Hart Park's Recreation Services Supervisor, with data from Southwestern Herpetologists Society.*

*Got Rattlers!? Not the Barbeque!!*

As many as 45,000 poisonous snake bites occur each year in the United States, most of these from rattlesnakes. While only 15 to 20 of these are fatal (more people die annually of bee stings, being struck by lightning or being struck by golf balls!), the rest suffer a painful, often dangerous and debilitating recovery time. Snakes do not bite people out of an aggressive desire to kill, but because they react to what their instincts interpret as an attack. Probably 90% of all snake bites could be prevented by following one simple rule:

“ALWAYS WATCH WHERE YOU PUT YOURS HANDS AND FEET”.

In essence, the practice of this rule is quite simple: You should be able to SEE your feet and hands at all times when in areas inhabited by venomous reptiles.

Watch where you put your feet: Watch the trail ahead of you. This will not only prevent your coming up unexpectantly on a resting rattler, but will help prevent falls over equally unexpected rocks, sticks or branches. Don’t step over a log or rock if you can’t see what might be below it or on the other side. Do step up on top of such an object, then way out and over it. Do wear good, high boots with loose jeans or pants outside them when hiking through brushy country that might be inhabited by rattlers.

Watch where you put your hands: Don’t climb a ledge or rocky hillside by reaching up beyond sight for your next handhold; who knows what may be sunning itself on that next ledge? Don’t reach under a rock or log that you can’t see under and don’t put your hands into any holes you can’t see into either.

Most importantly, Don’t play around with, tease or hassle rattlesnakes. At least one third of all snake bites occur to people who for one reason or another, are trying to do something to the snake – kill it, tease it, catch it. An act of bravado can be expensive; a momentary lapse of attention can be dangerous!

If a rattlesnake is in an inhabited area, it should be captured and relocated by an experienced herpetologist or Animal Control Officer if possible; destroying it is last resort.

If the rattlesnake is in the wild, let it go its own way. It will get away from you as fast as it can, and rattlesnakes are an important part of the natural world and the balance of nature.

Other things to know…

You cannot count the rattles on a rattlesnake to determine its age. A new segment is gained each time the snake sheds its skin, which can be at least two to five time a year depending on how well it’s eating. Additionally, the longer rattles of older snakes frequently break off.

Almost 85% of all rattlesnake bites in California occur from the waist up, on the upper extremities (hands and arms).

Most rattlesnake encounters occur between3:00 pmand sunset, when the hottest part of the day has already occurred and things are starting to cool off. Later in the day is also when most nocturnal prey animals (rats and mice) start to stir and move about that the snakes hunt.

Most of the 220 +/- average rattlesnake bites that occur in California every year happen in the southern most counties; including San Diego, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino and Kern.

Be careful and be safe!!