

# Safety Alert

## No: 75 Snakes in chambers

RPS

Following a near miss, the following safety alert has been created to raise awareness and remind employees how we can prevent similar incidents.

### What happened?

- A dead snake was found in a chamber by a colleague

### What can we do to prevent similar incidents?


We can do very little to control wildlife. However, we can prevent any harm coming to ourselves, our colleagues or the wildlife during our working activities.

Throughout the UK, snakes are protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act of 1981. This means it's illegal to kill or injure them. If you have any concerns regarding a snake issue we would advise you to contact the RSPCA or your local Zoo for specialist help and advice, as snakes need to be dealt with using very specific skills.



### Snake species found in the UK

It is rare to see snakes in the UK but there are some signs that you can look out for if you are concerned that they are venomous:

Adder – Common Viper			
	Dark brown, reddish or black zigzag from head to tail. Spots on sides.	Tend to have a timid nature only biting when cornered or alarmed.	Seen basking in sunny spots. Heathland, bogs, moorland, woodland edge, rough grassland; sometimes on derelict urban areas and railway banks.
	Entirely black adders sometimes occur.	<b>The only venomous native snake in the UK.</b>	Prefer sandy or chalky soils; rare found on clay soils.
	55cm in length.		Found in most counties of England, but rare in the north-west and the Midlands

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### Grass snake – Water snake



Olive-green, brown or grey in colour.

Neck: yellow or white mark, next to black mark.

Black bars down sides, some black spots on top.

Markings are occasionally faint.

75 cm in length.

Strong swimmers.

Very fast moving but not venomous.

Not being venomous their defence is to produce garlic smelling fluids from anal glands.

Associated with ponds, lakes, streams, rivers, canals, marshes.

Travel widely in surrounding habitats: woodland, grassland, low intensity farmland, heathland, derelict urban areas.

Can travel long distances.

Compost heaps and ponds may attract grass snakes.

### Slow worm



Brown, copper, golden or grey in colour; may have black/dark brown sides and thin stripe on back.  
Small head, often with dark spot.

Very shiny, metallic sheen to scales.

Tail often blunt. 35 cm in length, but can be shorter, as they often lose their tails.

Protected lizard species in the UK that is often mistaken for a snake.

Not venomous.

Slow-worms hibernate over the winter.

Found in heathland, bogs, moorland, woodland edge, rough grassland; often found in derelict urban areas and on railway banks.

Found in gardens with long grass and refuges such as wood piles.

May be found in city gardens.

### Smooth Snake



Grey or brown in colour.

Dark blotches on back, normally in pairs.

Dark blotch on head.

55 cm in length.

Not venomous.

Eggs are buried in sandy soil, in warm places.

Secretive, normally found underneath objects.

Very rare – only found close to heathland sites in Dorset, Hampshire and Surrey.

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### **Snake bite**

Most snake bites occur when someone accidentally steps on a snake while walking in the countryside.

Some snakes are venomous and can inject venom containing toxins as they bite. A bite from a venomous snake is a medical emergency because it can be deadly if not treated quickly.

Immediately after being bitten by a snake you should:

- Remain calm and don't panic – snake bites, particularly those that occur in the UK, usually aren't serious and are only very rarely deadly
- Try to remember the shape, size and colour of the snake
- Keep the part of your body that's been bitten as still as possible to prevent the venom spreading around your body
- Remove jewellery and watches from the bitten limb as they could cut into your skin if the limb swells
- Do not attempt to remove any clothing, but loosen clothing if possible
- Seek immediate medical attention

If you or someone you're with is bitten by a snake, you should NOT:

- Try to suck the venom out of the bite
- Try to cut the venom out of the bite or make it bleed
- Rub anything into the wound or apply ice, heat or chemicals
- Leave someone who's been bitten on their own
- Put anything around the bitten limb to stop the spread of venom (such as a tight pressure band, tourniquet or ligature) as it won't help, and can cause swelling or make it worse; it could also damage the limb, leading to the need for amputation
- Try to catch or kill the snake

Dial 999 immediately after being bitten by a snake to ask for an ambulance or go straight to your nearest accident and emergency (A&E) department.

You should give healthcare professionals a description of the snake to help identify it.