

Weekly Safety Briefings

Week 32 – Monday, August 3 – Friday, August 7, 2026

Uninvited Guests: Dealing with Dangerous Animals in the Workplace

Introduction – Uninvited Guests: Dealing with Dangerous Animals in the Workplace

Introduction for Leaders:

Wildlife encounters in the workplace happen more often than most teams discuss and more seriously than most people expect. Snakes, wasps, spiders, coyotes, and other animals regularly enter work environments, especially in outdoor, warehouse, loading dock, and grounds maintenance settings. The risk is not limited to exotic locations or unusual circumstances. It shows up in brush piles, storage rooms, loading areas, and under equipment that has been sitting undisturbed.

This week we are talking about the animals most likely to cause a problem in a workplace setting, how to recognize a dangerous situation, what to do and what not to do, and why reporting matters even when an encounter seems minor. The goal is not to make anyone afraid of going outside. It is to make sure that when someone does come across something unexpected, they know exactly what to do.

How to Frame This Week:

- Keep it specific to your environment. If you work outdoors, in a warehouse, near a loading dock, or in a wooded or brushy area, call that out. The more concrete the setting, the more the conversation will stick.
- Monday carries the weekly challenge. Remind the team mid-week and use Friday to report back.
- Encourage people to share encounters they have already had. Most crews have stories. Getting them out early makes the rest of the week feel relevant rather than theoretical.

Monday – The Animals We Share Our Workplace With

Discussion:

Most wildlife encounters at work are not dramatic. They are a snake under a pallet, a wasp nest inside a junction box cover, a spider in a glove that has been sitting on a shelf, or a rat that has made a home inside equipment that gets opened once a month. The animal is not looking for a fight. It is looking for food, shelter, or warmth, and your workplace happens to offer one of those things.

The danger almost always comes from the surprise, not the animal. A startled animal in a confined space is a different situation from the same animal in the open. A worker who reaches into something without looking and contacts an animal they did not know was there has no time to respond appropriately. That is the scenario we are trying to prevent.

The animals most commonly involved in workplace incidents:

Snakes, particularly venomous species like copperheads, cottonmouths, rattlesnakes, and coral snakes depending on your region, are drawn to warm, dark, undisturbed spaces. They show up under debris, in storage areas, along building foundations, and in tall grass near structures. Most bites happen when someone reaches or steps without looking.

Wasps, hornets, and yellow jackets build nests in wall voids, under eaves, inside equipment housings, in the ground, and in any undisturbed cavity. They are highly defensive of the nest and will sting repeatedly. Workers with allergies face life-threatening risk from a single sting.

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Spiders, including black widows and brown recluses, favor dark, dry, undisturbed areas such as storage rooms, gloves and boots left overnight, tarps, and the undersides of equipment. Bites often go unnoticed at first and worsen significantly over hours.

Rodents including rats and mice carry disease, contaminate food and surfaces, and can bite if cornered or handled. They also attract larger predators. Evidence of rodent activity in a work area is a health and safety issue that needs to be reported.

Coyotes and feral dogs are increasingly common near urban and suburban work sites. They are rarely aggressive unprovoked but can become a serious hazard if injured, cornered, or habituated to being fed by workers.

Weekly Challenge:

This week, each person has one job: walk your immediate work area and identify at least one place where an animal could be living, nesting, or hiding without anyone knowing. Look under, behind, and inside things that do not get moved or opened regularly. Report anything that looks like active nesting, droppings, or damage. We will hear what people found on Friday.

Tuesday – What to Do and What Not to Do

Discussion:

The most dangerous moment in most workplace animal encounters is the few seconds immediately after discovery. That is when the wrong instinct takes over. People freeze, lean in to get a closer look, try to shoo the animal away with their hand or foot, or attempt to capture it. All of those responses make the situation more dangerous, not less. Today we are going to talk through the right response for each of the animals we covered yesterday.

If you encounter a snake: stop moving immediately. Do not try to identify it up close, do not attempt to capture or kill it, and do not step over it. Back away slowly, keeping the snake in your line of sight. Alert your supervisor and keep other workers away from the area. Let a professional or a trained responder handle removal. Even a snake you believe is non-venomous can bite and cause serious infection.

If you discover a wasp or hornet nest: do not disturb it, do not spray it with a liquid, and do not try to knock it down. Back away calmly and without swatting. Notify your supervisor immediately. If you are stung, move away from the area quickly since stings release a chemical signal that triggers other wasps to attack. Know the location of your nearest epinephrine kit and who on this crew carries one if your site has one.

If you find a spider in PPE, gloves, or boots: shake the item out before putting it on, especially if it has been sitting unused overnight or in a storage area. Do not reach inside blindly. If you find a spider and are unsure of the species, do not handle it. Report it and have the area treated.

If you see signs of rodent activity: do not handle droppings, nesting material, or a dead rodent with bare hands. Use gloves and a mask if cleanup is required. Report the activity to your supervisor so a professional pest control response can be initiated.

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If a coyote or feral dog enters the work area: do not approach it, do not feed it, and do not corner it. Make yourself appear large, make noise, and give the animal a clear path to leave. Alert others in the area and notify your supervisor.

A real-world example:

A maintenance technician walked into a storage shed early one morning and noticed a snake stretched across the doorway. His first instinct was to grab a shovel and move it so he could get to work. Instead, he stopped, backed away, notified his supervisor, and kept others out of the area. A trained wildlife responder removed the snake safely. By resisting the urge to handle the situation himself, the employee avoided a potential bite and prevented unnecessary risk to the rest of the crew.

Team member engagement:

"Has anyone here had an encounter with any of these animals at work or somewhere similar? What happened and what did you do?"

"Which of the 'wrong responses' we talked about do you think is the most common instinct on this crew? What makes it hard to override?"

"Do you know where the nearest epinephrine kit is and who on this crew carries one? Let's check."

Wednesday – The Bite You Did Not Know Happened

Discussion:

One of the most important things to understand about animal encounters at work is that the injury does not always announce itself. Snake bites can feel like a scratch. Spider bites are often painless. A wasp sting that seems like a minor irritation can be the beginning of an anaphylactic reaction in someone who does not know they are allergic. The window between contact and a serious medical situation can be very short, and it can close before a person realizes they are in it.

This is why we report everything. Not because every encounter is a crisis, but because the ones that are do not always look like crises at first. A coworker who was bitten by something and does not mention it because it seemed like nothing is a coworker whose condition you cannot monitor. That silence is the gap where serious outcomes live.

Signs that a bite or sting is becoming a medical emergency:

- Rapid swelling that extends beyond the immediate bite site, particularly if it is moving toward the face, throat, or torso.
- Difficulty breathing, tightening of the throat, or a feeling of the airway closing.
- Hives, flushing, or a rash spreading across the body away from the bite site.
- Dizziness, nausea, confusion, or sudden weakness.
- A wound that was minor the night before and appears significantly worse in the morning, particularly with a darkening center or spreading redness.

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A real-world example:

A grounds maintenance crew was clearing brush along a fence line when one of the workers reached into a debris pile with his bare hand. A copperhead had been resting underneath it. The snake struck before anyone saw it. The worker thought it was a stick or wire and kept working for nearly twenty minutes before the swelling made it undeniable. By the time his crew lead called for help, he could not identify the snake or describe it clearly. Emergency responders had to make treatment decisions without knowing the species. He was hospitalized for three days and lost partial grip strength permanently. Three other workers admitted afterward they had seen snakes in that area over the previous two weeks and had not said anything because they did not think it was a big deal. One had kicked a snake out of the way that very morning. The bite was not the only failure. The silence before it was.

Team member engagement:

"Have you ever noticed something, an animal, a nest, droppings, and not reported it because it seemed minor? What was your thinking at the time?"

"What would you do right now if a coworker told you they thought something bit them but they were not sure and it did not look like much?"

"How is your weekly challenge going? Have you found any spots that surprised you?"

Thursday – Prevention Is the Whole Game

Discussion:

Everything we have talked about this week, how to respond when you find an animal, what to do after a bite, how to recognize when something minor is becoming serious, is all the response side of this hazard. Today let's talk about the prevention side, because most of the encounters that lead to injuries were preventable with habits that take very little time and require no special equipment.

Practical prevention habits that make a difference:

Look before you reach. The single most effective prevention habit for snake and spider bites. Before reaching into any space you cannot fully see, including under a pallet, into a storage bin, behind equipment, or into tall grass, use a tool, a light, or a long stick to disturb the area first. Give anything living in there a chance to move.

Inspect PPE before putting it on. Gloves, boots, and hard hats that sit overnight or in storage are common harborage sites for spiders. Shake them out, turn them over, and look inside before putting them on. This takes about five seconds and has prevented countless bites.

Keep work areas clear of harborage. Debris piles, unused equipment, scrap material, and overgrown vegetation near structures are invitation signs for snakes, rodents, and nesting insects. Regular clearing of these areas reduces the conditions that draw animals in.

Never move material barehanded that has been sitting undisturbed. Pallets, tarps, lumber stacks, and stored materials that have not been touched in weeks are high-risk for harboring animals underneath or inside. Use tools to move the outer layers before getting hands involved.

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Report early and report everything. A nest found before it is disturbed is a controlled removal. A nest found after someone puts their hand through it is an emergency. A snake seen near a doorway and reported means a supervisor can address it. A snake seen, not reported, and then forgotten means the next person to encounter it has no warning.

A real-world example:

A warehouse employee grabbed a pair of work gloves that had been sitting on a shelf over the weekend. As he put them on, he felt what seemed like a small pinprick on his finger but assumed it was a splinter and continued working. About an hour later, his hand became swollen and painful, and he started feeling nauseous. He reported the incident to his supervisor, who sent him to an urgent care clinic. Doctors determined he had likely been bitten by a spider hiding inside the glove. Because he reported the symptoms as soon as they worsened, he received prompt treatment and avoided a more serious infection. The incident led the entire crew to adopt the habit of shaking out gloves, boots, and other PPE before putting them on.

Team member engagement:

“Which of these prevention habits is the weakest on this team right now? What makes it hard to maintain consistently?”

“Are there areas in our work environment that regularly accumulate the conditions we just described? What has been done about them, or what should be?”

“What would it take to make the ‘look before you reach’ habit automatic for every person on this crew?”

Friday – Week Wrap-Up

Discussion:

This week we talked about something that does not usually make it into formal safety training but shows up in the field regularly. We covered the animals most likely to cause a problem in a workplace setting and why most encounters go wrong in the first few seconds. We walked through the right response for each type of animal and talked about the wrong instincts that tend to take over when people are surprised. We talked about delayed presentations, the bites and stings that do not look serious until they are, and why reporting everything matters even when it seems minor. And we covered the prevention habits that keep encounters from happening in the first place.

The through line for the whole week is this: most serious animal incidents at work were not surprises. They were the result of conditions that had been building quietly, often noticed by multiple people, and not reported or addressed. The snake under the pallet that bites someone on Friday was probably seen near that area earlier in the week. The wasp nest that sends someone to the ER was probably known about for days. The reporting habit is not a formality. It is the gap between a controlled situation and an emergency.



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Weekly Challenge Report-Back:

At the start of this week, each of you was asked to walk your immediate work area and find at least one place where an animal could be living or nesting without anyone knowing. Let's hear what people found.

"What did you find, or what did you notice you had never actually looked at before?"

"Did anything get reported this week as a result of the challenge? What happened with it?"

"Were there any spots where you found evidence of animals that genuinely surprised you?"

Closing questions:

"What is one habit from this week that you are going to carry into how you physically move through this work environment going forward?"

"Is there anything about this site, an area, a material storage situation, a vegetation issue, that we should escalate based on what came up this week?"