



STATE OF NEVADA
DEPARTMENT OF WILDLIFE
DIVISION OF LAW ENFORCEMENT



GUIDE TO HANDLING WILDLIFE ATTACKS ON HUMANS

Distribution: All NDOW Game Wardens, Biologists, Public Information Officers, Director and Deputy Director.

- A. In the event of an animal attack, the responding NDOW employee may take any necessary and appropriate action that is within the scope of the employee's authority, to protect public safety. When evidence shows that a wild animal has attacked a human, the employee will use appropriate means to immediately and humanely kill the animal. The Division of Law Enforcement will lead the investigation of any wildlife attack absent exigent circumstances. All personnel that may respond to a wildlife attack should be familiar with this guide prior to an attack investigation.

Attack cases involving a human fatality: When NDOW personnel are first on scene of a fatality they will secure and protect the scene. Whenever possible the Division of Law Enforcement will work in conjunction with local law enforcement on fatalities to determine if a homicide has occurred. Keep in mind you will not have a cause of death until an autopsy has been completed. In the event of a human fatality the coroner's office may respond to the attack scene and work with the NDOW investigator to collect evidence.

- B. The following steps will be taken by responding employees, taking personal safety at the scene into account, as appropriate:

1. Medical

Ensure proper medical aid for the victim. Identify the victim (obtain the following, but not limited to: Name, Address, and Phone Number).

2. Notification

Notify NDOW dispatch center. Dispatch and regional lieutenant will coordinate to notify the following:

- Any available backup officers from NDOW or assisting agencies (local police, sheriff, BLM, USFS, USFWS, State Parks, etc.)
- Emergency medical services
- A carnivore specialist from the Game Bureau

- Law Enforcement and Game Division Chiefs
- Director and/or deputy director of NDOW
- Coroner's Office in the event of a human fatality
- Washoe County or Clark County forensic lab (depending on location of attack)
- Houndsmen (Wildlife Services or private) as necessary
- Department public information officer (PIO)

3. Scene

The site should be treated as a crime scene. Access to the scene will be limited so that evidence is not compromised. The Division of Law Enforcement will coordinate the response and act as the lead investigator absent exigent circumstances. Game wardens investigating an attack will use the regional "Wildlife Attack Kit" in conjunction with their regular investigation kit for evidence collection. Other NDOW personnel may be requested to assist with the investigation as necessary. Determine if the animal is still present in the immediate area and take necessary precautions. If no animal is present at the attack site, a profile of the animal should be prepared using information obtained from the victim, witnesses, tracks or other evidence from the area.

4. Offending Animal

Rapid response to a wildlife attack investigation is essential in order to expedite the capture of the offending animal and to preserve on-scene evidence. Whenever possible the offending animal will be humanely killed for subsequent rabies testing. The area should be protected from public access by use of flagging tape and signage. When possible one entry and exit path should be established. Only essential authorized personnel should be permitted in the excluded area. It is preferred that the entire carcass of any wildlife killed be preserved for examination by authorized forensic personnel. If this is not possible due to distance, terrain, etc., then at a minimum, the head, feet and the entire digestive tract should be collected for examination.

5. Evidence

- Absent exigent circumstances game wardens will document and collect evidence. Thoroughly document the scene and locations of evidence before moving or touching anything (Photograph and written description).
- It is essential to photograph all parts left behind. Blood and tissue samples must be preserved carefully in order to permit DNA analysis. Evidence will be collected from the attack site, the victim and the animal to confirm whether any animal destroyed was the offending animal. Rubber gloves will be worn at all times when handling blood, hair and tissue samples, not only to avoid evidence contamination but to protect

against potential disease transmission. Evidence collected from the attack site, the victim and the animal will be maintained separately to prevent cross-contamination.

A. Evidence from the scene:

- Clothing, objects used for defense during the attack, objects chewed by the animal, and any other materials which may contain the attacking animals saliva, hair, or blood. Photograph animal tracks at the scene.

B. Evidence from the offending animal carcass:

- Use paper bags to enclose the head and individual paws of the animal, then enclose the paper bags with plastic bags, then enclose the entire carcass in a large plastic trash bag or body bag. This will prevent contamination of evidence prior to a necropsy being performed (such as bloodstains or other such physical evidence originating from the victim).
- Additional evidence collected from the animal will include scaled photos and measurements of the canine teeth, blood and hair samples, tissue samples from the area under the claws, and fecal samples.
- Examine the claws, teeth, and fur of the animal. Collect swabs of any observed blood and human hairs from these areas (forensic lab will use these samples for DNA matching to the victim).
- Collect reference hairs, blood, and muscle tissue from the suspected offending animal. CDFG Wildlife Forensic Lab will need these for comparison to hairs and saliva collected from the victim.

C. Evidence from the human victim.

- When possible, use cotton swabs to swab the area around bite wounds to collect saliva from the offending animal. If the victim is alive, request attending medical personnel to collect possible animal saliva stains or hair that might be on the victim.
- Scaled photos of bite and claw marks or other wounds sustained by the victim.
- Outermost garments worn by the victim, including shirts, jackets, hats, backpacks, etc often will have hairs from the offending animal.
- Refer to “Dead Body Evidence Checklist” attachment for instructions on additional victim evidence collection.

D. Transfer of evidence:

- DNA typing and hair comparisons of animal hair should be sent to CDFG Wildlife Forensic Lab or another lab capable of performing DNA analysis on the particular species.

- Human blood, tissue, and other evidence should be sent to a human crime lab. Clark, Lincoln and Nye counties should use the Las Vegas Crime Lab. All other counties should use the Washoe County Crime Lab.

6. Autopsies

The Department veterinarian and the investigating game warden will attend any human autopsy, where death may be due to a wildlife attack, in order to gather evidence (DNA, bite mark analysis, etc.) and victim information. Attendance by both parties offers valuable insight into animal attack behavior which can be helpful to the Coroner's investigation. The officer should request that the body not be washed in order to allow for proper animal saliva sampling from wounds. When possible the animal's skull, or one similar, should be brought to the autopsy to assist the coroner. The officer should also bring photos, sketches, videos, and any other pertinent materials of the attack scene. It is also recommended that California Department of Fish and Game Wildlife Forensic Laboratory (CDFG WFL) be contacted and their presence requested.

The sterile swabs in the Attack Investigations Kit should be brought to the crime lab for the purpose of collecting additional animal DNA from the body. This DNA will be returned to NDOW for subsequent analysis.

7. Necropsy

- Upon coordination with the Coroner the NDOW veterinarian will lead a necropsy of the offending animal. The NDOW veterinarian may request CDFG WFL to attend the necropsy and help coordinate disease studies on the carcass. The NDOW veterinarian will retain the primary authority over this aspect of the carcass.

8. Reporting.

Once the investigation has been completed, the Wildlife Attack Report should be completed and submitted through the appropriate chain of command to the Chief of Law Enforcement. The format of the report forms instructs personnel of the sequential steps taken and the information to be documented, collected and processed. This will insure that for every attack by a carnivore (minor or fatal injuries), NDOW personnel are consistent in collecting the attack information and necessary evidence. The report consists of six parts:

- Attack Report
- Attack Site Investigation
- Victim Evidence
- Animal Evidence

- Necropsy Report
- Autopsy Report

9. Media

- All media contacts and statements pertaining to the incident will be coordinated through the lead investigator and a Department PIO.

Note:

- For attacks involving a human fatality do not release the name of the person killed (pending family notification).

Attachment (1)

DEAD BODY EVIDENCE CHECKLIST

1. Thoroughly document the scene and locations of evidence before moving or touching anything (Photograph and written description).
2. Preliminary visual inspection for any trauma or noticeable wounds.
3. Start with the collection of fragile or the most easily lost evidence (example: Lion hair on the body)
 - a. After visual trace evidence removed a lint roller or frosted scotch tape can be used to collect additional trace evidence.
4. Special consideration can be given to any evidence items which need to be moved.
5. Use sterile swabs to collect possible saliva from around wounds. (Use one drop of sterile water on swab if saliva is dry).
6. Use sterile swabs to collect blood samples.
 - a. Collect control samples from as close to wound as possible. (Use one drop of sterile water on swab if blood dry).
 - b. Collect other samples as necessary (Blood pool, etc.)
7. Collect other types of evidence as necessary.
8. Photographs should also continue for layers of evidence that were not previously documented because they were hidden from sight.
9. Depending on the condition of the body you may need to collect exemplars such as soil, maggots, vegetation, etc.
10. Bag the hands of the victim (preferably the coroner will collect evidence from fingernails).
11. Most evidence will be collected in paper containers such as packets, envelopes, and bags. Moist or wet evidence may be collected in plastic containers at the scene for transport and to prevent contamination of other evidence. Once in a secure location, wet evidence, whether packaged in paper or plastic, must be removed and allowed to air dry. Do not allow evidence containing moisture to be packaged without air drying for more than two hours (moisture allows the growth of microorganisms which can destroy or alter evidence).

AVOIDING CONTAMINATION OF DNA

1. Wear gloves. Change them often.
2. Use disposable instruments or clean them thoroughly before and after handling each sample.
3. Avoid touching the area you believe DNA evidence to exist.
4. Avoid talking, sneezing, and coughing over evidence.
5. Avoid touching your face, nose, and mouth when collecting and packaging evidence.
6. Put evidence into new and unused containers.
7. Air-dry evidence thoroughly.