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## What To Do When Tigers Attack?

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REXANO, [www.REXANO.org](http://www.REXANO.org) Editorial By Zuzana Kukol

Even though attacks by captive exotic animals are extremely rare, they create lots of sensationalized media coverage, such as the two recent tiger attacks at Missouri commercial facilities. When these accidents happen, usually the victims are the owners or the workers themselves, aka, a voluntarily accepted occupational hazard.

When it comes to the safety of general public, people are more likely to be attacked by a domestic animal or free ranging wild animals while hiking. Even these attacks are rare compared to the dangers of every day life, such as driving a car, eating salmonella contaminated vegetables, or walking down steps.

However unlikely, in case you're attacked by a wild or captive predator or in a position to help someone who is, here are a few hints on how to deal with this kind of emergency.

**Pepper Spray** is one of the best tools you can have when dealing with large predator attacks like big exotic cats or grizzlies, in the wild as well as in captivity. Using it will



hopefully cause the animal to release the grip on the victim.

It causes extreme irritation if applied to animal's (or human's) nose, eyes, or mouth. The effects begin almost instantly, within a few seconds of contact, causing an animal to retreat. The capillaries of the eyes will immediately dilate, causing temporary blindness. Inflammation of the breathing tube tissues will cause difficulty in breathing; however the animal will still be able to breathe. The painful, irritating effects usually wear off within minutes, leaving the animal unharmed in the long run.

Pepper spray comes in many sizes, from personal to grizzly size; the one pictured is a key chain version – easy to carry and have handy in case of an emergency. An AZA accredited San Antonio Zoo zookeeper was attacked by their Sumatran

tiger on July 2007, and a vial of pepper spray attached to his belt saved his life by spraying the tiger in the face.

It must be available in a split-second so you can save your life while being attacked, or are trying to save someone else being attacked. So keep on your belt or where you can get to it fast. You can purchase pepper spray from most gun and sporting goods stores or retailers on the Internet. They often have expiration dates, so you need to check that and periodically replace them. State personal possession laws vary.

Another great tool to have is an **air horn**, which also comes in small purse size and can be bought cheaply in any sporting store. The air horn is designed to create an extremely loud noise.



Unlike pepper spray, it doesn't physically disable the animal temporarily. It's key is the element of surprise. The noise, especially when applied close to animal's ears, is so LOUD and unexpected, that it should startle and scare the predator. The animal will likely release the victim, and run away, thus giving the rescuers a good chance to save the victim.



Another great tool to scare the predator and have them release the victim is a **CO2 fire extinguisher**, which was used in the 2nd Missouri tiger attack to 'guide' the tigers away from the injured teenager. This contains carbon dioxide, a non-flammable gas, and is highly pressurized. The pressure is so great, that it is not uncommon for bits of dry ice to shoot out the nozzle. CO2 extinguishers have an advantage over dry chemical extinguishers (the common household ones) since they don't leave a harmful residue - a good choice for use on animals since it is not toxic and will not harm them. The gas is very cold.

As with all emergency tools, keep the CO2 fire extinguisher near the animal cage where you can get to it quickly. In case of an animal attack, a blast from it will discourage the attack. You might also be able to direct the animal into a certain predetermined spot or back to the cage with this fire extinguisher. Your common household extinguisher has chemicals in it, so do not use that one. Just like pepper spray, it needs to be periodically checked.

Police and rescue personnel often carry hard **steel retractable batons** that come in different sizes, many small enough to carry around on your belt. Always check state laws regarding their personal possession.

In case you yourself are being the victim and don't have or can't get to our preferable method, a pepper spray, you can try to gag the animal with your baton, or any other hard stick or pipe lying around that you can reach. This is similar to the very common canine bite inhibition training, where you train a puppy not to bite by inserting your finger down their throat thus making them to associate biting with very unpleasant gagging reflex. The human finger is too small to gag a full-grown wild cat such as cougar, but a stick might do the trick. You can still get your hand injured, but in a life and death situation, it is worth a try to sacrifice your fingers to save your life.



Another method is to place the stick into the animal's mouth horizontally and push backwards – if this angle is more convenient (or the only doable one) during an attack.



This prevents the animal from completely closing its mouth and thus preventing it from chewing on the victim. Try & test it with your finger or pen to see if you can close your own mouth.



For smaller predators, large dog toys like a hard plastic Nylabone, can be used to gag the animal. Just like a police baton, this chew dogtoy prevents the animal from closing its mouth, like this pet Doberman demonstrates.

Another tool that many households have lying around and rescue personnel carry is a heavy duty ‘**Mag Lite**’.

They come in different colors and sizes. ‘Mag Lite’ can be used the same way a police baton is, as this juvenile lion with a MagLite in his mouth demonstrates.

The MagLite is made of hard metal and is thick enough to prevent the animal from closing its mouth and chewing on the victim.



Common **vinegar** has a taste many animals dislike. Keep a spray bottle with a mixture of water and vinegar on hand and use it the same way you would use a pepper spray. It is not as effective as pepper spray or a blast from a CO2 extinguisher, but it is an OK alternative if you run out and don't have time to go out and buy replacements for a more potent option right away.

Responsible owners of animals will have transport cages on the property to transport the animals in case of an emergency. Many have sliding door panels. These **door panels can be used as a shield** to prevent the animal from having direct access to you. This can be useful when protecting yourself



from the animal chasing you, or to get access to help somebody already attacked by giving you some protection.

When everything else fails and you have to resort to lethal force, you need to be careful. If you are good with knives and know animal anatomy well, you might be able to use them, but it is extremely risky. Of course in life and death situation, you might not have many other options or be too picky.

If other options are available, we don't recommend using knives or small caliber pistols such as .22mm. You will most likely injure and aggravate the animal, instead of killing it. A wounded animal in pain is very angry and therefore extremely dangerous

**Firearms** should be used only as a last result, and we recommend hunting rifles or .357 caliber guns or larger to quickly and humanely kill the animal.

Always make sure you are not putting a human life in more danger, as the story of a Polish veterinarian illustrates. In 2000, some animal rights activists were releasing captive exotic animals from captivity in zoos, including a few circus tigers in Poland. When the tranquilizer failed to work on one of them, the tiger turned on the vet. Police fired a few shots, missing the tiger, but hitting the vet in the head. The veterinarian later died in the hospital.

For a more detailed guide: **Emergency tips on keeper and rescue personnel safety in case of an animal attack** click [HERE](#)

***Additional Reading:***

**TOTAL NUMBERS AND ODDS OF AN ACCIDENTAL DEATH IN THE USA BY CAUSE OF INJURY in 2003** – comparing human fatalities caused by captive exotic and wild animals (average up to year 2006) to deaths caused in the course of a normal daily routine in every day life in 2003. REXANO only used fatalities numbers since all deaths are reported and there is only one degree of death. Injuries in all walks of life range from life threatening to simple Band-Aid fix and many go unreported. The average life expectancy of 77 years was used to calculate the lifetime odds.

<b>Cause of death in 2003</b>	<b>Number of deaths per year</b>	<b>One-year odds</b>	<b>Lifetime odds</b>
Captive non-human primate	0*	0	0
Captive bear	0.125**	1 in 2,416,000,000	1 in 32,000,000
Captive elephant	0.81**	378,000,000	5,000,000
Captive big/exotic cat	1**	302,000,000	4,000,000
Captive reptile	1.5***	201,000,000	2,700,000
Fireworks discharge	11	26,440,910	340,733
Contact with hot tap-water	26	11,186,539	144,156
Flood	26	11,186,539	144,156
Bitten or struck by dog	32	9,089,063	117,127
Earthquake and other earth movements	32	9,089,063	117,127
Struck by or against another person	39	7,457,692	96,104
Lightning	47	6,188,298	79,746
Contact with hornets, wasps and bees	66	4,406,818	56,789
Cataclysmic storm (****)	75	3,878,000	49,974
Animal rider or occupant of animal-drawn vehicle	101	2,879,703	37,110
Alcohol	373	779,759	10,048
Fall on and from ladder or scaffolding	417	697,482	8,988
Drowning and submersion while in or falling into swimming pool	515	564,757	7,278
Firearms discharge	730	398,425	5,134
Air and space transport accidents	742	391,981	5,051
Occupant of all-terrain or other off-road motor vehicle	906	321,026	4,137
Drowning and submersion while in or falling into natural water	1225	237,429	3,060
Fall on and from stairs and steps	1,588	183,155	2,360
Exposure to smoke, fire and flames	3,369	86,331	1,113
Motorcycle riding	3,676	79,121	1,020
Assault by firearm	11,920	24,400	314
Motor vehicle accidents	44,757	6,498	84

*Source: National Safety Council, National Center for Health Statistics, U.S. Census, animal attack news reports*

*\*In 1997 in Atlanta, Georgia, one Yerkes primate researcher supposedly died of herpes B after she was splashed in the eye with bodily fluids from a rhesus macaque; this can NOT be classified as animal 'attack', just like a nurse or doctor being accidentally infected with a blood from an AIDS patients can not be called a murder.*

*\*\* Based on 16 year average 1990-2006 numbers*

*\*\*\* Based on 11 year average 1995-2006 numbers*

*(\*\*\*\*)Includes hurricanes, tornadoes, blizzards, dust storms and other cataclysmic storms.*

*Note: Exotic animal yearly and lifetime odds numbers were rounded due to their extremely large size for the ease of use and quoting purposes in the media and legislative sessions.*

For complete statistical table, click [HERE](#)

***DISCLAIMER:*** *This is NOT an animal training article. The information presented here is only a recommendation on what to do in case of a wild or captive animal attack where the first priority is saving the human life. Suggestions below might distract the animal long enough to release the human victim, and hopefully terminate the need to use lethal force toward the animal. Not all methods will work on all animals. Always check your state laws regarding personal possession of guns, pepper spray and other tools mentioned here. No animals or humans were harmed while making this presentation.*  
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