



## Emergency tips on keeper and rescue personnel safety in case of an animal attack

By Zuzana Kukol, Summer 2007

**DISCLAIMER:** This is NOT an animal training article. The information presented here is only a recommendation on what to do in case of wild or captive animal attack where 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. Many items mentioned are common household items or standard equipment of a rescue personnel, police and hikers. Always check your state laws regarding personal possession of guns, pepper spray, alcohol and other tools mentioned here.



There might be a time when you might get attacked by a wild or captive predator, or you might be in a position to help somebody who is, so we will give you 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



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, including Wal-Mart.

The air horn is designed to create an extremely loud noise. They have been installed on semi-trailer trucks, fire trucks, trains, ambulances and other emergency vehicles as a warning device to clear the way, and on ships as a signaling device. These are usually attached to the vehicle.

The ones pictured are the portable personal air horns. Unlike pepper spray, it doesn't physically temporarily disable

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.

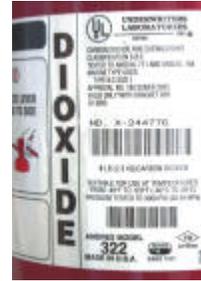
Pepper spray comes in many sizes, from personal to grizzly size; the one pictured is a key chain version which is easy to carry and have handy in case of an emergency. An AZA accredited San Antonio Zoo zookeeper was attacked by their Sumatran tiger on July 2007, and a vial of **pepper spray attached 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 somebody who is being attacked. So keep in on your belt or any place 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.

the animal. What it does is the element of surprise. The noise, especially when applied close to animals ears, is so LOUD and unexpected, that it will likely startle and scare the predator. Animal will likely release the victim, and run away, thus giving the rescuers a good chance to save the human or the life of your pet that is being attacked.



Another great tool to scare the predator and have them release the victim is CO2 extinguisher. 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. CO2 is harmless and more effective, but is not readily available in hardware stores so you might have to special order one or two. Just like pepper spray, it needs to be periodically checked.



Garden water hoses, which are usually found in every household, are also a good way to startle an animal. If you are a fireman, fire hose would definitely work better to scare the animal and even direct it to a certain spot with it.



The best nozzles are the simple ones that let you adjust the flow to a stream. Most animals don't like to be sprayed with fast stream of water in their face and eyes.



Water hoses probably work better on startling wild animals who are not accustomed to them. Captive animals are used to seeing them when their cage is being cleaned or water dishes filled up.



They are often sprayed in hot weather to cool them off, however, pleasant fine mist is used in that situation. So even with captive animals who are used to water hoses, spraying them with fast stream in the face in case of emergency might have a desired effect and cause the animal to release the human victim.



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 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. Human finger is too small to gag a full grown wild cat such as cougar, but stick might do the trick. You can still get your hand injured, but in life and death situation, it is worth a try to sacrifice your fingers to save your life.



Another method 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.



Be creative when you don't have a baton, many objects lying around animal compounds can be used.



For smaller predators, large dog toys like the above pictured hard plastic Nylabone can be used to gag the animal.



Just like a police baton, this chew dog toy is preventing the animal from closing its mouth, like this pet Doberman demonstrates.



Regular painter wire brush is also often found in many households and is common in animal compounds which often need a lot of painting and repainting. Wire brush is good to use especially for brushing lions mane or any animal that is shedding to remove the dead hair. It also gets the captive animal used to being touched all over and makes it easy to check for any bumps or illnesses. In case of an attack, it can be used the same way like a police baton. The wire is not fun to bite, so the animal is likely to release the victim and leave.



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.



A juvenile lion with a MagLite in his mouth.



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



Common vinegar has a taste many animals dislike. As an owner, you can



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

usually tell what flavors are acceptable to your animals and which ones they hate. Just like people, animals have personal preferences and what works on one might not work on all, so always have more than one emergency option/solution in case of an attack.

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.



Alcohol works on many reptiles and might work on some mammals as well. Pour few drops or spray the alcohol in the animal's mouth, which often causes the animals to release the grip.



Any hard liquor or rubbing alcohol can be used. As always, check local alcohol laws. ;-)



Hot culinary sauce also works on many animals by pouring or spraying it into animal's mouth or eyes. We tested (on ourselves) many different brands with 'HOT' names promising burning pleasure. Most didn't deliver, but we like our food very hot.



The ones that work best are 'Dave's Insanity Sauce'. They come in *Temporary, Original and Ultimate insanity* versions, and they really work. Just one drop of the Temporary insanity sauce can make your dish fiery hot. If you get it on your fingers, even after you wash your hands and scratch your eyes, you might end up with burning eyes. I call it 'edible pepper spray'. Just sniffing it makes humans cough and it has the same effect on many animals.



Responsible owners of animals will have transport cages on the property to transport the animals in case of an emergency. Many will have sliding door panels.



These door panels can be used as a shield to prevent the animal from having a direct access to you. This can be useful when protecting yourself from the animal that is chasing you, or to get access to help somebody already attacked by giving you some protection.



Small chain link panels also make a good shield, especially if you can position yourself into a corner, thus preventing the animal from having a direct access to you. Panels can also be used to throw at the animal and scare it, with the hope it will release the victim and runs away.



A battery operated '**electric cattle prod**', mostly known by brand name *Hot Shot*, is a handheld device commonly used to make livestock move by poking them. Some have interchangeable shafts that come in many lengths, up to 48 inches.

It is not strong enough to kill a human or a large animal from short-term exposure, but it is enough to cause significant discomfort. It is similar to stun batons, also known as tazers, that police use on humans.

Only use these in a life and death emergency situations. While some animals might release their victim and run away when shocked, others might get angry and turn on you, the rescuer. Always use the longest shaft you can and carry more tools to defend your life, including a firearm as a last resort, so you, the 'rescuer', don't become a victim yourself.



When everything else fails and you have to resort to a lethal force, you need to be careful. If you are good with knives and know the 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.



We are not covering tranquilizing guns, since they require drugs that have to be prescribed by a licensed veterinarian. Chemical capture can take up to 20 minutes to take an effect, too long to wait when a human life is in imminent danger.

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.

**No animals were harmed while making this presentation**

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