



Emmaus Catholic College
87-109 Bakers Lane
Kemps Creek NSW 2171

Date of Inspection: 8th November 2017

Re: *Snake Hazard Assessment. Provide recommendations to manage regular snake incursions to school grounds and amenities.*

Dear Harvey,

An inspection of your facility was undertaken on Wednesday the 8th November 2017 to assess the school for the likely presence of snakes and snake entry points. The meeting was attended by yourself and several of your grounds and maintenance staff. It my understanding that snake intrusions are a regular and well documented occurrence at the school during the warmer months. Given that most snake species in the area are likely to be dangerously venomous, their presence not only threatens the safety of students and staff, it also significantly disrupts school operations.

Survey Scope:

Survey for potential snake habitat within the school grounds, assess building and structures for snake refuges and access points. Assess surrounding bushland and bush corridors for suitable snake habitat. Discuss solutions to alleviate and effectively management the risk posed by snakes.

Survey Methodology:

Opportunistic searches including walking the area actively looking for snakes, snake refuges and potential access points. Survey area adjacent to school grounds for suitable snake habitat. Explore reasons for snakes to enter school grounds with the frequency that they are currently doing.

Snakes are attracted to the basic needs for survival:

1. Shelter from the elements and predators
2. Shelter while moving to remain unseen from predators
3. Food
4. Water
5. Suitable basking sites to warm themselves

Site Description



Aerial view of site taken with Google Map

Aerial view depicts grassland on all sides of the school as well as easements and drainage lines. Western Sydney grasslands and waterways harbor several well-known species of dangerously venomous snakes including eastern brown snakes red-bellied black snakes and occasionally, tiger snakes. This view is well supported by local testimonials, evidence provided by snake catchers and ecological survey results. It is the view of the assessor that brown snakes and black snakes would account for the vast majority of venomous snake sightings in this region. The mildly venomous Yellow-faced whip snake, golden crowned snake and marsh snake are also native to this area and are relatively common.

On a broader scale, the effects of urban and industrial development are replacing large areas of snake habitat forcing snakes to relocate to adjacent lands often resulting in a corresponding increase in snake sightings. Records of an increase in snake activity both at the school and other SSSAFE clients in the area, strongly support this observation.

Fence Lines and borders

The inspection revealed the surrounding lands are of high value habitat for eastern brown snakes and red bellied black snakes.



Habitat is ideal for snakes along this natural drainage line cutting through school grounds to the west. The presence of water, long grasses and weeds, litter and debris provide highly suitable habitat for snakes.



Snake habitat features to the SW of school



Snake habitat to in between the Retirement Village and High School



Grassy paddocks surrounding the School Site



In order to avoid predators, snakes often prefer vegetated areas to open ground where they can remain covered and forage without detection. Basking snakes are likely to remain close to cover. The school has plenty of well-maintained gardens, open ground and playing fields and is not necessarily a snake attractant as such. However, as it lies within a region that is abundant with snakes it highly probable that snakes will continue to enter school grounds on a regular basis during the warmer months when they are most active.

If we consider the age of the buildings it is unsurprising that snakes, upon entering the grounds, will find cover in garden beds, weep holes, ageing brickwork and beneath footpaths that are undercut.



Ageing brickwork



Undercut pathway where a snake was seen to retreat

In my professional opinion snakes will continue to be a hazard within school grounds with some occasionally taking up residence within structures of the school. Given that it is neither possible or practical to completely prevent this from happening, remedial measure should be sought to alleviate the risk.

The problems posed by the continual influx of snakes have not been alleviated despite the efforts of Emmaus Catholic College and the preventative measures currently in place; ongoing maintenance of school grounds and garden beds, education of students and staff on what to do and what NOT to do if they see a snake and a focus on snakebite emergency management plans. Evidently they are an almost daily disruption to regular school activities and an ever present threat to staff and student safety.



Garden where several snakes have been sighted

Garden beds can provide shelter to snake, so it is important that they are well maintained. Clearly delineated gardens and pathways assist staff and students to see snakes and reduce the chances of surprise encounters that can be dangerous. The College Grounds Staff are well aware of this situation.

Controls and Recommendations:

As for most areas in the Western Sydney, the complete elimination of snakes is neither achievable nor practical. The following the control measures are recommended:

- Maintain garden beds, keep grass in the playing fields and along fence lines short and spray weeds to reduce snakes cover and further discourage snakes from taking permanent residence.
- Consider installing door sills and use fillers to ensure all gaps / holes leading under concrete paths, slabs and buildings are filled and thus preventing snakes from entering buildings to prevent snake entry. This is difficult with older dwellings.
- Actively control rodent populations wherever possible through regular and systematic baiting programs. Take care when inspecting bait stations as snakes will sometimes use them as hides.
- Prevent the build-up of organic debris, waste and building materials. Try to have timber, sheeting materials and storage containers raised above ground by at least 20cm or more to discourage snakes from inhabiting such areas.

Additional Controls:

- Staff and students are regularly reminded of the presence of snakes in the surrounding areas. Closed footwear, long trousers and gloves should be adopted for all landscape maintenance activities.
- Conduct annual educational and awareness programs that focus on snake avoidance and snakebite first aid for all to ensure adherence to best practice in the event of a snake sighting or snakebite, and to better inform discussions on snake risk between staff and students.
- Source appropriate snakebite compression bandages and or Snake Bite Kits from SSSAFE.
- Have select staff undergo Nationally Accredited Snake Relocation training through SSSAFE and the Registered Training Organisation, Risk Response and Rescue. It is preferable to have someone on-call and on site who is properly trained and equipped to respond to the appearance of a snake in a timely, safe and effective manner. SSSAFE strongly recommends this training and it is always preferable to the reliance on community volunteers or self-styled and so-called, professional snake catchers. Many of these “Snake Catchers” are poorly trained and frequently adopt highly questionable, inappropriate and risky snake catching techniques such as “tailing”. Often they arrive lacking suitable PPE, with inadequate equipment or are simply not properly trained in its use. If they do arrive, it is often too late for any meaningful remedial action to occur. Finally, it is almost impossible for school staff to adequately VET local snake catchers unless

they have undergone some form of training themselves, to know what good technique and safe practice looks like.

During the inspection I found the school grounds to be of relatively low value snake habitat, but not so its surrounds. Snakes will remain common in the open grasslands, paddocks, vegetated easements and road corridors of Sydney's West. For this reason alone, snakes will continue to be a risk factor for the school. It is neither practical or possible to eliminate snakes from entering the school grounds, therefore other measure need to be considered such as training select staff to safely manage the problem.

SSSAFE wishes to thank Emmaus Catholic College for the opportunity to assist in this matter. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you require any further assistance.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Adam', with a horizontal line underneath.

SSSAFE Director

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