

Reptiles

The method requiring the least human contact should be used for venomous snakes

PREFERRED METHODS

INJECTABLE MEDICATIONS

This method is preferred due to its effectiveness in this taxon and low level of animal distress. Most useful for controlled situations where the animal can be contained. **Requires veterinary assistance.**

GUNSHOT, BLUNT FORCE TRAUMA TO THE HEAD

Acceptable in emergency situations (venomous species or large constrictor threatening public or staff safety, or the animal is in severe distress.)

ALTERNATIVE METHODS

Carbon Dioxide (CO₂)

This method may not be completely effective in reptiles due to their low oxygen requirements and breath-holding ability (particularly for turtles). This must be followed by secondary methods (decapitation and pithing) and verification of death. Brain death can be distinct from stoppage of the heart in reptiles. Because of this, this method is not recommended for staff without training and equipment to verify death.

Decapitation

Decapitation is an acceptable method of euthanasia in *anesthetized* reptiles. This should be followed by pithing whenever possible to ensure brain death. Due to low oxygen requirements, brain function can continue for some time after decapitation. Pithing involves insertion of a needle or rod through the rear base of the skull and side to side movement to destroy the brain. Because of this, this method is not recommended for staff without training. **Contact WHP before using this method.**

Freezing using standard freezers is **not an acceptable method** of euthanasia for reptiles or amphibians, since it can cause pain due to ice crystal formation and time to death may be significantly prolonged while the animal remains conscious.

Amphibians

TOPICAL MEDICATIONS (20% BENZOCAINE)

Apply a generous amount of the commercially available **20% benzocaine gel** (Orajel™), enough to thickly cover the underside and inner thighs. Leave the amphibian in a container, in a cool and quiet spot for 20-30 minutes. Avoid handling after application. Check for non-responsiveness: body flaccid and no blinking when eyes are gently touched. If submitting for necropsy or diagnostics, place the non-responsive amphibian in a solution of **70% ethanol** for preservation.

Amphibian heart beat often continues after death so its presence is not always an indication of euthanasia failure.

*Methods for amphibians include everything under Reptiles, but benzocaine is the preferred method.



Department of
Environmental
Conservation



College of
Veterinary Medicine