

Dear Residents of Newport Cove:

As most of you know by now, we do have a small alligator family living in our lake along with many other wildlife such as snakes, frogs, lizards, iguanas, turtles, ducks, otters, fish, and various species of small and large birds of prey.

Residents of Newport Cove should be aware and respectful that we all live and share the natural habitat of South Florida wetland wildlife. You and your pets are more likely to suffer a coral snake bite or the poisonous secretion of a bufo toad in your front yard than you are to be attacked by the docile alligators residing in our lake.

IT IS A CLASS C MISDEMEANOR TO TOUCH, FEED, HARASS, MOLEST, MOVE, OR KILL AN ALLIGATOR IN THE STATE OF FLORIDA PUNISHABLE BY A FINE OF UP TO \$2500 AND 30 DAYS IN JAIL

The wildlife around us deserve as much space and respect as the rest of us do, therefore, this letter is to serve as a proactive effort to educate and keep all residents, guests, and pets of Newport Cove safe as we continue to share the beauty of South Florida's nature with its original and natural inhabitants.

ALLIGATOR AWARENESS & SAFETY ETIQUETTE

Being safe around alligators is straightforward. Concerns about having negative encounters with alligators can largely be dissolved with common sense and an understanding of alligator behavior. To put the risk of an alligator attack into context, you are more likely to get struck by lightning or win the lottery than you are to be seriously injured by an alligator. Still, alligators are large carnivorous predators that demand respect. Enjoy encountering them in the wild, and you can feel safe by taking into account the following:

- **Don't feed alligators.** This is a most important rule as feeding alligators threatens the safety of both people and animals. Providing food for these wild animals (that are naturally afraid of humans) not only makes them bolder and encourages them to seek out people, it also alters their natural diet in an unhealthy way. Do not feed ducks, turtles or any other animals inhabiting waters with alligators. This food source attracts the alligators as well and trains them to associate humans with foods. Lastly, do not clean fish in the water or leave your scraps or bait on the ground as that is also a potential food source for alligators. Feeding alligators is punishable by law with fines up to \$150 and up to 30 days in jail.
- **Keep your distance.** Although they may look slow and awkward, alligators are able to move swiftly on land over short distances. It is highly unlikely to be chased by an alligator but as a precaution, a safe distance from an adult alligator should be maintained at about 60 feet. If the alligator hisses at you, you are too close.
- **Do not attempt to move alligators.** If you see an alligator on the move, leave it alone and let it pass on through. Alligators move the most in spring and summer when they are breeding.
- **It is illegal to harass or throw things at alligators.** They are living organisms that warrant respect and it is not productive to annoy them. Molesting, injuring or killing alligators is punishable by law with fines up to \$2500 and 30 days in jail.
- **Never disturb nests or small alligators.** Some female alligators protect their young and may become aggressive if provoked. Although baby alligators are docile, they should never be

captured, even if the mother is not visible. She may be watching you and decide to take action to protect her baby. Mother alligators will sometime react by hissing, lunging, or swimming toward you but are just signaling you to go away.

- **Do not attempt to keep alligators as pets.** Keeping a baby alligator as a pet is a foolish idea not to mention illegal in some states. Although they start out cute and small, they grow into the large predator that you observe outdoors.
- **Keep your pets and children away from alligators.** Large alligators do not recognize the difference between domestic pets and wild food sources. When they are hungry, alligators act on their hunting instinct and might attempt to feed on your house pet if given the opportunity. Keep your dogs on leashes around alligators. Do not allow your dogs or children to swim in waters inhabited by alligators, or to drink or play at the water's edge. To an alligator, a splash potentially means a food source is in the water.
- **Do not corner alligators.** if participating in recreational activities, such as skiing, canoeing, kayaking, or even taking photographs. These behaviors can make them feel threatened, causing them to react defensively. Do not panic if an alligator slips off the bank into the water. It is highly unlikely that it is coming to attack you; it is simply trying to move to another location where it feels safer.
- **Do not call the authorities unless you or your pet are in grave danger.** We have been told by the Alligator Hotline as well as the official Florida State Fish and Wildlife Commission that people posing as authorized "trappers" are actually underground alligator meat dealers - they will NOT release the alligator to a proper sanctuary or safe haven - instead, they will illegally sell the alligator to be slaughtered for its meat and hide.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ON ALLIGATOR SAFETY & AWARENESS CAN BE FOUND ON THE FOLLOWING WEBSITES:

<http://www.american-bird.com/dos-donts-alligator-safety/>

http://myfwc.com/media/152524/Alligator_Brochure.pdf

<http://srelherp.uga.edu/alligators/alligator-safety.htm>

<http://www.postandcourier.com/article/20140423/PC16/140429696>

<http://tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/park-information/alligator-safety>

Sincerely,

Newport Cove Animal Welfare & Safety Committee