

APRIL *Safety Talk*

Topic: Bear Aware

Bear-Human encounters are becoming far more frequent as workers reach further into bear habitat, or as we develop in their habitat.

There are two terms used to describe bear behaviour in proximity to humans:



Habituation:

Habituated bears are those that become comfortable around people and tolerate them at a closer distance. They no longer behave as if they fear humans. A bear learns to increase its tolerance toward humans if repeated exposure results in no negative or positive outcome.

Food Conditioning: This means that the bear is not only willing to be around people, but is actually attracted to the places people live, camp or travel because it hopes to get food from them. Repeated food rewards reinforce the bear's continued presence.

Habituated or food conditioned bears are still wild animals, and they still retain their self-defense behaviours.

Bears are basically solitary animals. Each has its zone of personal space, which varies from animal to animal. If you invade this space, a response in the form of a bluff charge, bodily contact or outright attack may result.

Often a grizzly will simply ignore humans unless their "space" is invaded, or if they have cubs.

BEAR SAFETY TIPS

If you are working in an area that you suspect has bears in the vicinity:

- Make noise. Let the bear know you are there. Call out, clap, sing loudly, especially near streams, dense vegetation and berry patches.
- Watch for fresh bear signs. Leave the area if you spot any.

If you encounter a bear:

- Do not approach the bear.
- Make sure you are not standing between the bear and its' escape route.
- Stay calm and don't alarm the bear with screams or sudden movements. Your calm behaviour can reassure it. Bears may bluff their way out of an encounter by false-charging, woofing, growling, snapping their jaws and laying their ears back. Remain calm if a bear reacts this way – sudden movement or screaming may trigger an attack.
- Speak to the bear – talk calmly and firmly. This lets the bear know you are human and not prey. If a bear rears on its hind legs and waves its head about, it is trying to see and smell you in order to identify what you are.
- Back away from the bear slowly. Keep the bear in sight, but do not make eye contact (seen as a sign of aggression).
- Do not run. A bear can instantly reach speeds of 30 to 35 miles per hour; never try to outrun a bear – you won't! Running from a bear may elicit a chase response.

It is very difficult to predict the best strategy to use in the event of a bear attack. That is why preventing encounters is the best strategy!

If you are attacked (which rarely happens):

- If the bear is acting defensively – if it is feeding, protecting its young and/or unaware of your presence, it attacks because it sees you as a threat. Play dead. Lie on your stomach with legs apart and position your arms so your hands are crossed behind your neck. This position makes you less vulnerable to being flipped over and protects your face, back of your head and neck. Remain still until you are sure the bear has left the area.
- If the bear is predatory: Try to escape into a building, car or up a tree. **DO NOT PLAY DEAD.**
- **Fight back!** Intimidate the bear; shout, hit it with a branch or rock; do whatever it takes to show the bear that you are not easy prey.

