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# JULY Safety Talk

## Topic: Avoiding Wildlife Encounters

Wherever you live and work in British Columbia, chances are you could come across a wild animal at some point – whether driving to and from work or while on vacation, or while performing your work duties.

Bears, cougars and coyotes are the most expected animal encounter while working, but any animal species can be dangerous when protecting their young.

### Know what you could possibly encounter.

As with any workplace hazard, perform a risk assessment prior to starting the job. Does the wildlife exist in the area year round? Can you lessen the risk of an encounter by scheduling the work when they are not expected to be there? Often the wildlife will have a daily routine – and mid-day is a good time to avoid an encounter, while dawn and dusk are not.

### Avoid interaction with wildlife, if possible.

Whether it is a bear, cougar, coyote, or protective cow moose or doe, avoiding an encounter is better than having to survive an encounter.

### Take safety training appropriate to the risk.

Specific knowledge about the species you could be exposed to can provide you with invaluable information in avoiding the risk of a wildlife encounter.



BC has one of the highest populations of black bears in the world. “Bear Aware” was the topic of the April 2013 safety crew talk and won’t be repeated here but can be found on our website: [www.bcmsa.ca/resources/crew-talks](http://www.bcmsa.ca/resources/crew-talks)

The cougar is the largest of the three wild cats in Canada, and are formidable hunters. Since deer are the cougars’ most common food source, there is a good chance of encountering cougars where deer are plentiful. Despite common folk lore, cougars do not jump onto prey from above; rather, they stalk and use bounding leaps to attack (they are a cat, after all).



Coyotes are not generally aggressive, although those that are more urbanized have less fear of humans and may behave aggressively. If you work in an urban area where you are more likely to encounter a coyote, such as a park, green space or waste facility, it is important to know what to do if you encounter an aggressive coyote: make yourself appear large, maintain eye contact, speak in a firm loud voice, wave your arms and throw sticks, rocks, or whatever is available to you (the same as you would if you encountered an aggressive dog).



### Talk to your employer about bear spray.

Not all employers will support the idea of providing bear spray as a deterrent for wild animals. The need for this type of hazard control would be determined by conducting the risk assessment and determining if other controls would be more or equally as effective, including avoiding interaction if possible.