WorkSafe Bulletin

Plan for and prevent encounters with bears and other hazardous wildlife

Encounters with bears and other animals in wilderness settings have led to serious injuries and deaths in British Columbia. There's a lot you can do to prevent and avoid dangerous encounters.

All worksites operating in wilderness areas should ensure their health and safety program considers hazardous wildlife and includes ways to mitigate the risks of encounters. This safety bulletin provides information to help licensees, employers, and supervisors plan safe work. Workers such as tree planters or surveyors may also find this information useful.

What is the hazard?

Grizzlies, black bears, cougars, and large ungulates such as moose and elk are some of the hazardous wildlife to be aware of in B.C. Wild animals can be more dangerous when they are defending food sources, habituated to human food, or defending their young.

Responsibilities

Licensees and employers are responsible for ensuring the health and safety of workers who are on their worksites and for following any regulatory requirements. Supervisors also have an important role to play in keeping workers safe.

- Educate and orient workers on working safely around bears and other hazardous wildlife.
- Train supervisors in risk assessment.
- Make sure workers have an effective means of two-way communication (e.g., two-way radio).
- Provide workers with any equipment necessary for their safety.
- Make sure supervisors tell workers about any hazards that have been identified in the area and what to do to minimize their risk.
- Have appropriate first aid, rescue, and evacuation procedures to ensure prompt medical care for injured workers.
- Engage workers in discussions about health and safety.

Bears and other wildlife can become more dangerous when they are defending food sources.

Workers have a right to refuse unsafe work and must not perform work that puts them or others at risk. Their supervisor or employer must then take the proper steps to determine if the work is unsafe and remedy the situation.

Managing risks

It's important to develop and implement a process for managing risks in the workplace by following these steps.

Identify hazards and assess risks

Start by identifying hazards and risk factors in work and camp areas. For example:

- Are there food sources that are likely to attract bears or other wildlife?
- Are there signs that bears are in the area, such as scat or signs of feeding? Is it berry season?
- Have you planned work at an optimal time to reduce risk to workers? For example, has vegetation grown to the point where it has become an attractant or limits visibility?
- Are there dogs that may act as an attractant in the camp or at worksites?
- Do you have remote worksites that are difficult to access? Will timing of the work contribute to risk? For example, after logging is finished, roads are often decommissioned, making it harder to get in and out.

Control risks

- Set up camps away from food-rich areas, salmon-spawning areas, or areas where there have been previous problems with bears or other wildlife.
- Use safe food storage and disposal methods.
- Avoid sending workers to remote locations by themselves. Have them work in pairs or groups. If that isn't possible, ensure there are frequent check-ins and a means of two-way communication.
- Plan workdays so workers aren't out in the early morning or evening, when animals are most likely to be foraging.
- Supply workers with deterrents such as bear spray, bear bangers, and air horns.
- Report bear and other wildlife issues to the nearest wildlife office.

Educate and train workers

During your young and new worker orientation and training, educate workers about basic information on bears and other wildlife, including:

- The types of food bears are likely to forage for
- How to identify black and grizzly bears
- How to identify bear signs (e.g., tracks, scat, tree markings, carcasses)
- What to do if there is evidence of wildlife
- What to do if followed or attacked by a bear
- How to avoid attracting wildlife

Hold additional crew talks or safety meetings if there's new information about wildlife in the area.

If you supply workers with deterrents, train workers in how to safely use, store, and transport them (as set out in the product's instructions). For more information, refer to the product's safety data sheet or contact the supplier.

For more information and resources, visit worksafebc.com/wildlife-insects.