

BEAR AWARENESS

Bear attacks are extremely rare. There are approximately a thousand human-bear encounters each year, but only a few result in personal injury. Most bears will actually retreat before you even know they are in the area due to their heightened sense of smell and hearing. It is still important to be alert and pay attention when in their environment. Remember never ever approach a bear cub as the mother is usually not far away.

If work is being performed away from the work site it is important for the worker to always checks with the appropriate authorities to see if there has been any bear activity in or around the area.

Black Bear



Colour:

- ◆ Black, brown, cinnamon or blond, often with a white patch on the chest or at the throat;
- ◆ They can appear to have a grizzled (brownish grey/salt-pepper) coat in certain lighting;

Body description:

- ◆ Height at shoulders: Approx. 61-91 cm (2-3 ft);
- ◆ Weight: 90-214 kg (200-475 lbs);
- ◆ Body length: 123-183 cm (4-6ft).

Characteristics of Black Bear:



- ◆ Straight line roman nose facial profile from tip of nose to top of forehead;
- ◆ Larger more erect pointed ears, especially on cubs and immature bears;
- ◆ Tails are small, furry flap of skin measuring only about 4.8 inches in length;
- ◆ No hump over shoulder, but some body postures give the appearance of a hump;
- ◆ Back is the highest point on body;

Grizzly Bear



Colour:

- ◆ Black (rare), brown or blond. Fur often white-tipped or "grizzled". Light-coloured patches may occur around neck, shoulders and on rear flanks;
- ◆ In spring and fall, mature animals may have a rug of fur under chin;

Body description:

- ◆ Height at shoulders: Approx. 91-107 cm (3-3.5 ft);
- ◆ Weight: 146-382 kg (315-850 lbs);
- ◆ Body length: 180-213 cm (6-7 ft).

Characteristics of a Grizzly:



- ◆ Curved face or concave facial profile from tip of nose to top of forehead;
- ◆ Pronounced shoulder hump (shoulder hump is the highest point on the body), relatively small short rounded ears;
- ◆ Tails are small and stumpy;
- ◆ Spring and fall a mature animal has a ruff of fur under chin;

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Special point of interest:

- If work is being performed away from the work site check with appropriate authorities to see if any bear activity in the area.
- Be bear alert and pay attention.
- Clean up the "Shack" before leaving work site.

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Characteristics of Black Bear:

- ◆ Front claws rarely exceed 1½", dark colored, sharply curved for climbing, tree climber;
- ◆ Track of hind foot has rounded heel, wedge in instep of hind foot;
- ◆ Exceptional hearing and smell;
- ◆ Has good vision similar to humans, see's in color;
- ◆ Exceptional tree climbers and strong swimmers;
- ◆ Can run up to 56-66 km (35-41 mph);
- ◆ Can live up to 25-30 years.

Characteristics of a Grizzly:

- ◆ Adults often have grizzled (gray-tipped) cap of long hair over shoulders, fur can be black, grizzled or blond;
- ◆ Claws: Usually 3 to 4" long, slightly curved, and often light colored;
- ◆ Track of hind foot has pointed heel, no wedge in instep of hind foot;
- ◆ Exceptional hearing and smell;
- ◆ Has good vision similar to humans, see's in color;
- ◆ Can climb a tree and strong swimmers;
- ◆ Can run up to 40-50 km (25-30mph);
- ◆ Can live up to 25-30 years.

Bear Deterrents:

Bear Spray (concentration of .85% capsicum, label should indicate "deterrent" not "repellant"):

- ⇒ Carry two canisters (260 ml);
- ⇒ Effective range 3 meters;
- ⇒ Keep spray within hands reach;
- ⇒ Maneuver to favorable position if deploying bear spray;
- ⇒ Remove safety clip;
- ⇒ Depress the trigger with your thumb;
- ⇒ Deploy first 3 sec. burst directly towards bear's face (a can only has 6 sec. of spray).

When transporting Bear Spray take into account the safety of others, pack in airtight container, do not transport in cab of vehicle and if flying airlines or pilots must be informed.

Noise Deterrents are launched from a launching device; pen launchers, bangers, screamers, 12 gage crackers, 12 gauge whistle crackers and air horns.

- ⇒ Always be aware of "the line of fire";
- ⇒ Potential for ricochet;
- ⇒ Potential for causing fire;
- ⇒ Never directly fire at the animal;
- ⇒ It should explode between the worker and the bear.

Bear Attack

1. **Identify the bear quickly upon your encounter:**

- ◆ Knowing your bear has some bearing on how to approach an attack (refer to "Bear Characteristics").

2. **Assess whether the bear in front of you is behaving "defensively" or attacking behavior is "predatory":**

- ◆ Typical reasons for a bear to behave defensively include the need to protect cubs, protect food, surprise, confusion, or fear, an impression that their space has been invaded or their exit is blocked. Predatory behavior is usually brought about by hunger and is indifference to your human status—you look like a meal.

HEALTH AND SAFETY HUMOUR

When workers at a rig in Northern Alberta, attended a fire safety seminar, they watched a fire officer demonstrate the proper way to operate an extinguisher.

'Pull the pin like a hand grenade,' he roared. 'Then depress the trigger to release the extinguishing agent.'

Later Simon Baxter, a rather nervous, young and new worker was selected to extinguish a 'controlled fire' in the live demonstration area.

In his nervousness, he forgot to pull the pin.

The instructor roared, 'Like a hand grenade? And again louder, 'Like a hand grenade, remember?' In a burst of confidence Simon pulled the pin and hurled the extinguisher into the blaze.

Bear Attack (cont.)

3. Regardless of whether you're being attacked for "predatory" or "defensive" reasons, a bear is dangerous when they decide to attack:

- ◆ Try to make yourself appear bigger than you really are. Hold your arms up above your head and spread your legs apart (keep your balance). You could also raise your jacket above your head to give the impression of greater height, but realize that this may mean less protection on your body should the bear suddenly attack and you can't put it back on quickly enough. Don't use your jacket if it means removing a backpack;
- ◆ Avoid making any eye contact—eye contact can be perceived by a bear as a threat and can provoke a charge or an attack. By the same token, never take your eyes off the bear—know what he is doing at all times;
- ◆ Avoid any sudden movements and never run. Animals that chase prey for food react to movement, so don't harbor notions of outrunning the bear. The bear is able to run over 40 mph (64 km/hr);
- ◆ Noise may or may not make things worse. Small bears, including black bears, can be scared away with noise. Be aware that larger bears, including large black bears and polar bears are often simply made more curious by noise and could head towards the noise (i.e., *you*) to check it out;
- ◆ The common advice about climbing a tree is—don't. If attacked by a black bear don't climb a tree, as they are great climbers. However, climbing a tree might increase your chances of survival if fighting a larger bear, such as a grizzly bear (but even they are pretty decent climbers). If you do climb a tree make sure the bear is not strong enough to knock the tree over. Also make sure that you have sufficient time to climb high enough that the bear cannot reach you if he stands on his hind legs (which he can do quickly). In this latter case, if you do find yourself forced to climb a tree, climb really high to a point where even a small 300 pound bear cannot go without snapping the branches;
- ◆ Try to create some distance between you and the bear—distance is your ally while you defend yourself. If defending yourself without a weapon you lack a safe enough reach to harm the bear without him harming you. Do your best to put something large in between you and the bear, like a tree or a rock.

4. Deal with a bear charge as calmly as possible:

- ◆ After a bluff charge, talk softly, wave your hands slowly above your head and back away slowly;
- ◆ Note that if a bear rears up on its hind legs—this is often an attempt to see what is happening rather than an immediate launch into an attack. Stay still and let the bear assess you; it may find you unworthy of further interest;
- ◆ A grizzly will tend to make a direct charge, while a black bear may zig zag charge. Above all, do not run or you will trigger the bear's instincts to give chase (unless you are very close to a secure place). Naturally, being surprised by a stealth charging bear can make this easier said than done, so always be alert when in bear country;

5. Know when it's okay to play dead and when it's not:

- ◆ Most experts say that you should never play dead with a black bear. In doing so, you might be giving yourself up for dinner. However, not all bear experts agree that playing dead does not work with black bears. Author of *Bear Aware*, Bill Schneider, suggests that "if you can't identify the bear it's still best to play dead".
- ◆ If a brown bear or grizzly roughs you up a bit, stay flat and silent. However, if they start to lick your wounds, stop playing dead; the bear is getting serious and is viewing you as its next meal. You'll need to fight for your life. Punch, kick, make noise, use a weapon, hit the bear with rocks or sticks or any improvised weapon you can get your hands on. You want to convince the bear that you are not easy prey;
- ◆ If you make the decision to play dead and you are wearing a backpack, leave it on. It's slightly more protection than without one. Lie face down on the ground, legs splayed and cover the nape of your neck with your hands, locking your fingers together and use your elbows to cover your face. If rolled over turn back onto stomach and stay very still and silent.

6. Exploit Bears Weaknesses:

- ◆ Try to defend yourself on a steep slope or grade; in doing so, you can ensure that any bear will at least have a difficult time standing erect, thereby reducing his full weight force (from a standing position, a bear can benefit merely from using his own weight to harm you);
- ◆ Attacks from the side may be difficult for the bear to see well (bears' neck muscles and jaw structure make it difficult for them to rotate their necks easily, limiting their viewing range from the side), so you might be able to take advantage of this fact. Be aware that a bear will likely attack horizontally too, which can inhibit your own horizontal strikes.

IMPORTANT: CLEAN UP THE "SHACK" BEFORE LEAVING WORK SITE.

7. **Fight for your Life:**

- ◆ Reach for whatever you can to fight with. Sticks, dirt, rocks, etc. can be thrown into the bear's eyes, poked into his eyes, or can be used to hit him across the snout (a very sensitive part of a bear). Be careful when retrieving such objects, as you will probably be tempted to squat or bend over, which can make you appear even smaller and you might lose sight of the bear;
- ◆ When defending yourself you must be quick. You must try to increase your distance, be aggressive and try to avoid the bear's strength (the power of the bear's strike).
- ◆ Do a straight-line/gut kick if you have to/can. Straight line kicks can be effective—this is the kind of kick performed by police when breaching a door. Strike quickly and draw your leg back fast before the bear has a chance to swipe your inner thigh (if the bear manages to do so, you're effectively disarmed). If on a hill though, realize that if the bear is lower than you, he will lead his attack with his head because of the difficulties of standing, so you'll need to aim the kick accordingly.
- ◆ A bear's neck, skull and rigid jaw muscles can be used as resistance. If done correctly, a kick landed on the face may cause hemorrhage due to the bear's resistance, potentially causing whiplash.
- ◆ If punching a bear, be aware of how useless this can be and how it can endanger you a great deal. A punch usually only works when landed squarely on the bear's nose. Where possible, avoid punching because it exposes your very vulnerable arms and hands.
- ◆ Where you can, strike and move uphill, strike and move uphill. Staying uphill may give you more of a chance to inflict enough damage to the bear to give you a chance to escape.
- ◆ Protect yourself above all. Be aware that you can't take a strike. The large swipes from a bear have been known to kill elk and deer in one movement; you will likely fare no differently. Use your backpack as a shield, throw things at the bear like your pack, camera, books, shoes or drink bottle; preferably aim for sensitive areas of the bear's face.
- ◆ If you have hit the bear or caused him pain, recognize that the bear will see you as a continuing threat. He will either run away or continue his assault until he has removed his perceived threat.

8. **Pull out your pepper spray and use it (read instructions before going into bear country):**

- ◆ You may not have any spray (not everyone agrees with lugging around what is effectively a chemical weapon requiring careful handling and that comes with a hefty price and deteriorates quickly);
- ◆ Bear pepper spray is useless in a backpack. It needs to be carried in a holster or attached directly to a pack strap that is within easy reach because the speed of your reaction matters;

Instructions:

- 1) Only effective at 3 meters or less, check the wind direction (won't do any good to spray the bear only to have it come back at you), remove safety clip, aim the pepper spray at the bear press the trigger with your thumb, deploy first 3 second burst directly towards bear's face (Note—a can only has 6 seconds of spray).
 - 11) Expect a reaction—the bear will experience immediate, intense pain from stinging eyes and will probably experience breathing difficulties. An angry disoriented bear will probably still come after you, so don't delay if the spray has given you a chance to get away.
 - 111) If it's raining heavily, the spray may not be effective.
- ◆ Forgot the pepper spray, use any repellent you have; even insect repellent might cause stinging eyes in a pinch. Don't rely on any other form of repellent other than pepper spray as your anti-bear arsenal because they generally do not make any impact at all; use of them is a last ditch desperate act.

9. **Be Realistic:**

- ◆ The suggestions in this Newsletter are just that—suggestions. There is no one checklist for surviving a bear attack and what is provided here are generalizations drawn from a variety of sources based on people's own bear encounter experiences. None of these approaches are guarantees of survival in a future bear encounter, as how a bear will react depends largely on how you (and any companions) react. Above all, always be prepared and stay calm; being in bear country carries responsibilities of which you should be aware before entering.

