

## As bears exit hibernation, OPP and province urge caution during encounters

By **Sam Odrowski**

As the seasons change and bears emerge from hibernation, the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) is working with the provincial government to inform the public on how to stay safe and prevent attacks.

While Black bear attacks are extremely rare in Ontario, averaging less than one per year and often happening in remote areas, there is currently little natural food for bears. This results in them searching for other food sources, lying in garbage bins, bird feeders, and other residential receptacles, bringing them into populated areas.

If bears begin to make their presence known, there are several things the public can do to stay safe.

The OPP and the province suggest never feeding or approaching bears, storing garbage in waste containers with tight-fitting lids (preferably indoors), and waiting until pickup day to put out garbage for collection to reduce the odds of an encounter.

Another key suggestion is to remove bird feeders for spring and summer and instead offer birds natural alternatives, such as flowers, nesting boxes, or fresh water.

After barbecuing, be sure to clean the grill and grease traps of any food residue.

Keeping dogs on a leash and storing pet food indoors are two other ways to reduce one's chances of encountering a bear, according to a joint statement by the province and OPP.

Bears have excellent memories and will return to where they have found food in the past, sometimes travelling over 100 kilometres. If bears have been an issue at your property in the past, remain vigilant for their return, especially as the weather warms and they emerge from hibernation.

?Alert neighbours about any bear activity and share these Bear Wise tips to reduce attractants in your community,? reads the province's joint statement with the OPP.

When encountering a bear in a non-life-threatening setting, the public is encouraged to call a non-emergency, toll-free Bear Wise reporting line at 1-866-514-2327. The line operates from April 1 to Nov. 30 and is available 24/7.

If a bear poses an immediate threat by exhibiting threatening or aggressive behaviour, remain calm and call 911.