

OPP remind people to be safe as bears come out of hibernation

Ontario and OPP are reminding people to take simple precautions this spring to prevent attracting black bears as they come out of hibernation.

The potential for human-bear conflict increases when there is little natural food available for bears. If this happens, black bears will search for other food sources, such as garbage and bird feed, which can draw bears to populated areas.

Follow these simple instructions to minimize the chances of attracting bears:

? Store garbage in waste containers with tight-fitting lids.

? Put out garbage only on the morning of pickup.

? Put away bird feeders. Seed, suet and nectar also attract bears.

? Pick fruits and berries as they ripen ? don't let them rot on the ground.

? Clean outdoor barbecue grills after each use, including the grease trap underneath. Bears will be drawn by smells from great distances, including grease and food residue on grills.

? Keep dogs on leash; sometimes bears will follow off-leash dogs back to you.

Bears entering a populated area are only a danger if they pose an immediate threat to personal safety or that of the general public.

?By taking some simple steps everyone can help avoid human-bear conflicts,? commented Natural Resources and Forestry Minister Bill Mauro. ?These steps will help to make your home, neighbourhood, business or schoolyard less attractive to bears.?

Since 2004, Ontario's Bear Wise program has been educating people about bears, how to avoid attracting bears and how to prevent human-bear conflicts. The Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) and OPP have agreed on the roles and responsibilities for both organizations to help the public understand which organization to contact when they encounter a bear.

If a bear is posing an immediate threat to public safety by exhibiting threatening or aggressive behaviour, call 911 or the local police. At the request of police, during daylight hours the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry will respond to emergency situations to assist.

For non-emergencies, MNRF operates the toll-free, 24/7 Bear Reporting Line (1-866-514-2327) and the Bear Wise website to provide the public with information and advice.