

Police were compelled to shoot bear in Newmarket

York Regional Police were forced to shoot a black bear Monday morning following numerous sightings over the weekend in Newmarket.

While bear sightings are not a police matter, police reported officers will respond to these calls if public safety is compromised. The bear was first sighted Saturday at approximately 5:30 a.m. in East Gwillimbury and sightings continued into Monday morning, when the bear was reported in the area of Yonge Street and London Road in Newmarket.

Over the weekend, in an attempt to capture and relocate the bear, officers contacted the Ministry of Natural Resources (MNR), the University of Guelph, a horse veterinarian, the Ontario Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, local Animal Control and the Toronto Zoo. Only MNR staff are equipped and trained to respond, they said.

Monday morning, the bear climbed a tree in a residential backyard near an elementary school. Officers attempted to keep the bear contained in the tree while awaiting the arrival of MNR staff. They banged chairs and deployed a cruiser siren among other methods, but eventually the bear, agitated and likely dehydrated, climbed to the ground. The use of a conducted energy weapon (CEW) was considered, however, officers could not get close enough without compromising their safety in the event the CEW was ineffective. Officers were left with no choice but to use lethal force in order to preserve public safety.

?The officers involved and York Regional Police regret the incident but there were no other options,? said Chief Eric Jolliffe.

?Police officers are not equipped with tranquilizers, nor are they trained on the containment of wild animals. We will be following up with the MNR in an attempt to improve the response to such incidents.?

Police remind the public that most bear problems occur as a result of improperly stored household garbage. Bears quickly learn to associate human residences and campsites with a readily available food source. They also warn people not to approach a bear to get a better look or a picture. Slowly back away and leave the area. If you are near a building or a car, get inside as a precaution.

Police add it is important to keep dogs away from a bear. While a well-trained dog may deter a bear, a poorly trained one may only excite it.