

# INDUSTRY ALERT

## INJURY

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## *Aggressive bear charges silviculture worker*

### What happened?

An employee of a northwestern Ontario forestry consulting and contracting firm stepped out of his truck at noon on a June day and was preparing to enter the bush when he was alerted to the nearby presence of a black bear by the sound of the animal popping its jaw. When the worker turned to face the bear it charged him, striking him in the right leg and knocking him to the ground. The 100-kilogram bear then moved on top of the worker. The worker was able to fight off the animal by kicking and punching it. When he got to his feet he grabbed a shovel and confronted the bear and it fled into the bush. The worker suffered minor scratches to his leg.

This was the fifth and most recent close encounter between a silviculture worker and a black bear in northwestern Ontario since 2000. In two incidents in 2005, a worker suffered serious injuries after being dragged out of his tent by a bear and a project supervisor was bitten through the boot by a bear but escaped injury. In 2003, a WSIB claim for mental trauma was filed by a worker after a bear encounter that resulted in no physical injury. In 2000, a tree planter was bitten three times in the leg by a bear that was eventually frightened away by a co-worker. In the worst incident of its kind, a Quebec forestry worker was stalked, attacked and mauled to death by a predatory bear in the spring of 2003. ([http://www.ofswa.on.ca/thelog/july\\_2003/july\\_03\\_page\\_4.pdf](http://www.ofswa.on.ca/thelog/july_2003/july_03_page_4.pdf))

### How can it be prevented?

Black bears are generally shy but they will act defensively and can become aggressive if they believe their cubs are threatened, if they perceive danger or if they sense the presence of food. Although bear behaviour is never entirely predictable, the chances of an attack can be minimized by observing certain rules:

1. In the event of a close encounter, ensure that the bear has a clear escape route, then make as much noise as you can and throw rocks or sticks at the bear. The sound of a whistle or compressed-air horn will frighten most bears away.
2. Never run away from a black bear – this can trigger the animal's hunting/pursuit response. If the bear remains close in spite of the noise you're making, start slowly backing away from the animal.
3. If you see a bear, let the rest of your crew know immediately that it's in the area. Stop working, get your group together in a cleared area and make as much noise as you can. Ask your supervisor to confirm that the bear has left the area before work resumes.

OFSWA has produced a safety meeting topic, *Dealing with Black Bears*, which companies can use to make employees aware of the hazards associated with black bears. It explains how to minimize encounters with bears at the work site or camp, and what to do in the event of an encounter. A related information booklet is useful for anyone who works in the bush. To order these products call OFSWA at 705-474-7233 ext. 267 or visit [www.ofswa.on.ca](http://www.ofswa.on.ca) and click on "Products". Ministry of Natural Resources information on bears can be accessed by visiting [www.mnr.gov.on.ca](http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca) and clicking on "Bear Wise".

[www.ofswa.on.ca](http://www.ofswa.on.ca)



Although the description of circumstances arises from an actual situation, this Industry Alert does not reflect the final analysis of the situation, nor is it meant to assign blame on the part of any person or member firm. For further information, contact OFSWA at 705-474-7233. For details on Ministry of Labour prosecutions regarding recent health and safety incidents in Ontario workplaces, visit [www.labour.gov.on.ca](http://www.labour.gov.on.ca) and click on "News Releases".