

INDUSTRY ALERT

INJURY

Tree planter attacked by bear suffers bite wounds to her leg

What happened?

A 19-year-old woman was planting trees in a remote section of her planting area when she encountered a bear. The planter followed the procedure outlined in the company's manual by making as much noise as possible and walking away. But the bear followed her and when she tripped, it bit her on the left thigh. The planter tried to fend the animal off with her shovel, but she was bitten twice on the back of her left calf before the bear was distracted by the planter's lunch long enough for the planter to get away. She reached the access road and warned her planting partner, who had been working a couple of hundred metres away and heard her screams, that the bear was still in pursuit. Her partner placed himself between her and the bear and threw stones at the animal, delaying it long enough for the injured planter to get farther away. The pattern of delaying and retreating continued until the two planters reached a supervisor's vehicle 1.2 kilometres (.7 miles) from the initial attack site. The planter was transported to hospital where her injuries required 39 stitches.

Why did it happen?

Black bears are generally shy, but they can quickly become aggressive if they believe their cubs are threatened, if they perceive danger, or if they sense the presence of food. It isn't clear what caused the bear to attack in this case. The fact that the planter was working by herself a fair distance from her partner may have emboldened the animal. There was no sign of bear cubs in the immediate area.

How can it be prevented?

Bears behavior is never entirely predictable, but attacks on humans are extremely rare and the chances of an attack can be minimized by observing certain rules:

- If you see a bear, let the rest of your crew know immediately that it's in the area. Stop planting, get your group together in a cleared area and make as much noise as you can. Ask your supervisor to make sure the bear has left the area before planting resumes.
- In the event of a close encounter, ensure that the bear has a clear escape route, 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.
- Never run away from a bear, it can trigger the animal's hunting/pursuit response. If the bear remains close in spite of the noise you're making, slowly back away from the animal, being careful not to trip as you do.
- Try as much as possible to plant in pairs, especially when working in remote areas, so that you can come to your partner's immediate aid if necessary

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