BC **Forest Safety** Council

Planning & Management

Safety Alert Type:
Planning and Management

Location: West Kootenays - Tam O' Shanter Creek Near Riondel, BC

Date of Incident: 2008-05-07
Company Name: Adam Rodgers, RPF

Details of Incident:

The Grizzly Bear incident occurred on May 7, 2008. Worker 'x' was working alone for the day but was in radio contact with other crews (approximately 1km away). His specific task was to hang ribbon to identify the location for a proposed road. Worker 'x' attended a tailgate safety meeting that morning and was aware of potential hazards on the site, including animal awareness (a cougar had recently been observed in the vicinity). At approximately 10am, Worker 'x' came face to face with a 2 year old Grizzly Bear. He froze and watched as the bear approached. He tried to call on his hand-held radio for assistance but was partially unsuccessful because the radio was located in an inside pocket in his 'cruising vest'. By the time he got his radio out, the bear was dangerously close (arms length away). Acting under instinct Worker 'x' dropped all his field gear, turned and ran downhill with only his radio in hand. Worker 'x' was issued Bear spray but did not carry his personal protective equipment device with him that day. While running, He managed to key the mike a couple of times; however, the conversation was fragmented on the receiving end. Other crewmembers believed Worker 'x' was being mauled by the bear and initiated a response based on the written emergency evacuation procedure for the site. The safety certification auditor called for an ambulance. The first aid attendant and helper began hiking towards Worker 'x'. By the time Worker 'x' was approximately 500m away from the first grizzly encounter, he was still running and was full of emotion. As he came upon a very steep slope, he fell down and bruised his knee and chipped his tooth. As he stood up, he discovered the Grizzly Bear had continued to follow him through the forest. Worker 'x' was again at an arms length away from the bear. The Grizzly was standing on all 4 legs above Worker 'x' and swayed side to side. By then, Worker 'x' had begun to experience symptoms of stress and of minor shock. Worker 'x' began to yell and scream for his life because he was afraid and was without bear spray / bear bangers. Fortunately the bear did not come any closer. After a couple of minutes, the Grizzly Bear lost interest and moved on. By 10:30am, the supervisor and first aid attendant had arrived at the scene and found Worker 'x' to be aware and safe. His level of shock was minor yet he was very disturbed by the incident. The first aid attendant and helper proceeded to sweep of the area to ensure the bear had left. The first aid attendant radioed the safety auditor to use his cell phone to call off the ambulance. Worker 'x' and everyone else left the forest and discussed the event for an hour or so at the trucks before deciding to call it a day.

It should be noted it is difficult to enforce standard operating procedures for bear encounters. Worker 'x' chose to run and he was not attacked. In our opinion he made the right choice because he is still alive. Whether or not he would have been attacked if he chose to back away slowly (as per the bear aware seminar) is not part of this investigation.

Recommended Preventative Actions:

- Bear spray and/or bangers MUST be carried (1 per crew and 1 per person if working alone) at ALL times between March 1st and November 30th.

- Ensure hand held radios are readily available, especially in the event of an emergency.
- When working alone, make sure you are aware of your surroundings. It is important to look at terrain features when locating a road, but also to look outside the road prism for hazards such as curious bears.
- Back away slowly from any Grizzly Bear encounter.

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