



TWO PEOPLE INJURED IN ENCOUNTER WITH BLACK BEAR

SAFETY ALERT

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Enform

Enform is the health and safety association for Canada's upstream oil and gas industry. We provide leading health and safety training, programs and services, touching the lives of hundreds of thousands of workers each year. We are dedicated to the continuous improvement of safety with a vision of eliminating work-related incidents or injuries in the upstream oil and gas industry.

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For more information on this event, please contact: safety@enform.ca

Description of Incident:

An environmental scientist was conducting an environmental site assessment on a lease site in northern Alberta accessed by helicopter. The site was densely vegetated. The helicopter circled the site from the air and no bears were observed prior to landing. The scientist was relatively new to conducting this type of work in a remote environment.

After being on site for about 40 minutes, the scientist was working quietly, kneeling down and taking field notes. The helicopter was shut down and both the helicopter and pilot were about 45 metres from the scientist. When the scientist looked up from recording field notes, a black bear was 2 metres away. The scientist was not carrying any food and did not have any bear deterrents. The scientist stood up, alerted the pilot, and calmly spoke to the bear. The bear attacked and bit the scientist once on the leg.

The pilot responded and approached holding bear spray but tripped and as a result the bear was able to get close and bit the pilot's wrist. Despite having been bitten, the pilot successfully sprayed the bear at close range and the bear retreated. The pilot and scientist returned to the helicopter and the pilot flew to camp 15 minutes away. The two people were transported by ground ambulance to a hospital where they received treatment. In addition, both received critical-incident stress debriefing and were able to return to work the following day.

The bear involved was estimated to be two to three years old and exhibited predatory behaviour, as evidenced by:

- The bear advanced onto the site quickly and quietly and gave no warning of its presence.
- The bear did not look around or back up during the encounter, indicating it was not concerned with cubs.
- Its head position was low. It completed a half circle then zeroed in and kept its eyes locked on the scientist.
- The bear bit the scientist and then immediately let go to reposition, indicating a test bite.

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Alberta Environment and Sustainable Resource Development was informed. They took samples of the workers' clothing and attempted to capture the bear. The bear was not captured and the search was suspended.

Actions of predatory bears and wildlife can be unpredictable therefore, the information in this Safety Alert focuses on minimizing the potential for wildlife encounters. Having crews trained in wildlife awareness, using bear spray, carrying a first aid kit and having a helicopter on site made a positive difference in the outcome of this incident.

Corrective/Preventive Actions:

- **Identify hazards that increase the risk** – Apply additional controls to address wildlife when there is dense vegetation or other hazards on a site. These hazards include obscured visibility due to overgrown vegetation and in-season berries that may attract wildlife.
- **Never work alone and always be visible** – Work together with others and stay within a group. Stand up to see and be seen. Make yourself look as big as possible. Avoid crouching or kneeling.
- **Be prepared. Carry bear spray and deterrents on your person** – Wear deterrents in a convenient and easily accessible location and be prepared to use them. Practice retrieving and using bear spray.
- **Vigilantly monitor for wildlife and make noise** – Maintain a constant watch for wildlife and use air horns or other noise-making devices.
- **Implement adequate controls for green hands and/or inexperienced workers** – New and young workers are at greater risk; ensure these workers are provided on-the-job training and supervision.

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