



North Tahoe and Meeks Bay Fire Protection Districts



June 19, 2017

Chief's Corner: Sierra Sun and Bonanza Sharing Lake Tahoe with Bears and other Wildlife

According to California State Parks, "Black bears have a very keen sense of smell and are attracted to any food or refuse they can smell. A California black bear was once tracked as it traveled three miles upwind, in a straight line, to a food source." If you've spent any significant amount of time in the Lake Tahoe Basin, there's a good possibility that you've seen a bear. Maybe you've seen one from afar, or maybe you've come home to find your house has been "broken into", and the gas stove is lit. Whichever the case, the following will help you with what to do in the event you run into a bear, or help you decide the safe lengths you should go, to discourage bears from entering your home.

A few weeks ago our Public Information Officer, Beth Kenna, who has been with the District for a year, had her "first encounter of the bear kind." Kenna arrived on scene in Tahoe City, to a mother bear and her three cubs that were attempting to cross the street. There was a significant amount of people surrounding the bear, and dangerously close to the road. It was clear that bystanders simply wanted videos and photos of the bear, but in turn caused a heightened level of anxiety for the mother and three cubs. Traffic soon became backed up, and without the assistance of NTFPD PIO Kenna, Placer County Sheriff's Office and California Highway Patrol, there could have been a vehicle accident, or worse, injury to the public on account of the bear. If you happen to see a bear while visiting Lake Tahoe, please give it some space and allow it to go on its way. Please be respectful of the animal, and also mindful of your safety. It is easy to get caught up in the excitement of seeing a bear, and forget about one's safety. The wildlife in the area have to cross busy roads to get to the lake. If you see a bear attempting to cross the road, only if it is safe, stop and let the animal cross. Give the animal plenty of space, and then proceed on your route.

Break-in bears, as mentioned above, are common to the area. Bears get into the house through a door or window, and unfortunately, when rummaging for food in the kitchen, can sometimes turn on appliances. Depending on the type of appliance, dangerous gas can be emitted into the air and potentially ignite a large scale structure fire. Some homeowners will set up bear discouragers such as nail boards or electric bear fencing.

Nail boards are typically plywood, full of upward-pointing nails or drywall screws placed in front of doors and windows to discourage bears from entering a building. While these nail boards might sound satisfactory for detouring bears, they can be extremely unsafe if our firefighters show up to your house for an emergency. Reports of injury to first responders and the public have both been documented due to nail boards. Ann Bryant, Executive Director of The Bear League says it well "just like the NTFPD, the Bear League is anti-bear/nail boards because of the harm they inflict on unknowing public who step on them. A small dusting of snow, and you'd never know they were in place."

In addition to bear/nail boards, another application to homes is the electrical bear fencing. If you chose to use electrical bear fencing to keep bears out of your home, it is strongly recommended to solicit a professional that knows how to properly install the fencing. Our firefighters have responded to several incidents of arching wires, with the potential to start a structure fire. "The District has investigated several structure fires caused by bear break-ins, with either severed gas lines or a bear inadvertently turning on the fuel at the stove when foraging for food" says NTFPD Division Chief of Fire and Life Safety and Fire Marshal Todd Conradson.

For additional information, visit:

In California: <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/conservation/mammals/black-bear>.



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In Nevada: http://www.ndow.org/Nevada_Wildlife/Bear_Logic/

Michael Schwartz joined the North Tahoe Fire Protection District as its Fire Chief in 2012, after serving 29 years with a neighboring fire agency. Along with his wife Jean, they have been a part of the Lake Tahoe community since 1978.