

# HAZARD ALERT!

## Aggressive bear charges worker

### WHAT HAPPENED?

At noon on a June day, a worker from a northwestern Ontario forestry consulting firm stepped out of his truck 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, who was able to fight the animal off by kicking and punching it. When the worker got to his feet he grabbed a shovel and confronted the bear, which fled into the bush. The worker suffered minor scratches to his leg.

There have been a number of 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.

### HOW CAN IT BE PREVENTED?

Black bears are generally shy but will act defensively and become aggressive if they believe their cubs are threatened, perceive danger, or 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. Provide loud escape route:** 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. Back away slowly - don't run:** Never run away from a black bear – this can trigger the animal's hunting and pursuit response. If the bear remains close despite the noise you're making, start slowly backing away from the animal.
- 3. Raise the alarm:** If you see a bear, let the rest of your crew know immediately about its presence 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 the bear has left the area before work resumes.

