

Safe Operating Procedures for Working Near Wildlife

Purpose

To define the safe operating procedures in a manner that informs and instructs employees of CUSTOMER of the key health and safety points and controls to remember when working in areas where wildlife can be found.

Background

The following hazards may occur when working in close proximity to wildlife creatures:

- Infectious disease transmission from mosquito or small animal bites
- Swelling, mild or severe allergic reactions from stinging insects
- Serious injury or death from contact with black bears

Personal Protective Equipment

- Insect repellent
- Long-sleeved shirts and pants
- CSA-approved safety boots (no sandals)
- Insect spray designed for bees/wasps/hornets
- Bear spray or horn

Safe Operating Procedure

General

- Always carry a cellular phone, or other two-way communication device, in case emergency medical help is required.
- Be aware of your surroundings, and note any wild or suspicious acting animals in your work area. If necessary, seek safe shelter from these animals and contact the appropriate authorities.
- Avoid reaching or stepping into or over hidden areas that may contain wildlife.
- Be aware of signs that indicate above or below ground animal nests, and take appropriate action to prevent contamination.
- Avoid direct contact with bird, bat or other animal droppings.
- Avoid direct contact with animal blood. If contact cannot be prevented, wear rubber gloves, and dispose properly.

Safe Handling of Live Fish

As part of St. Lawrence River Institute of Environmental Sciences' mandate, many employees are required to handle live fish for the purposes of education and research. Careful handling can reduce stress on the fish and gives it a better chance to live and reproduce.

- Minimize the time that you handle the fish. Handling a fish to exhaustion may cause it to die later.
- Keep fish in the water while handling and releasing them. If you must handle fish, completely wet your hands or wear soft cotton or wool gloves that have been soaked in water. This prevents damage to the fish's protective mucous surface.
- Prepare your measuring board, or have the camera and other equipment ready – you must act quickly if you must measure or photograph the fish. Minimize the time the fish is out of the water.
- When handling a fish that is to be released, be gentle. Don't squeeze the fish or put your fingers in its eyes or gills since this increases mortality.
- When releasing a fish, never just throw it into the water. If you have to handle a fish, release it gently and headfirst. A fish will often swim away on its own. If it doesn't, hold the fish gently in front of its tail and slowly move it back and forth to push fresh water over its gills. Release it when it begins to swim away.
- Always remove your gloves, and thoroughly clean your hands after handling live fish.

Biting and Stinging Insects

- Know what kind of biting and/or stinging insects to expect in the area or work location.
- Ensure there is a ready supply of insect spray in your vehicle or work area.
- If you are allergic to bee or wasp stings, ALWAYS carry a pre-loaded syringe of adrenalin (such as EpiPen), and notify your Program Leader. Understand and know how to administer the medication yourself.
- Do not wear perfumes, colognes, scented soaps or powders.
- Tuck pants into your socks or work boots.
- Wear light-coloured clothes, if possible.
- Look out for stinging-insect nests – any visible signs of activity around a particular hole or place.
- Destroy standing water for mosquitoes
- Do not swat at or make fast movements around stinging insects – most bees and wasps will not sting unless they are provoked or startled.
- If you find a bee or wasp in your vehicle, take a thick cloth and cover the insect before it gets frightened. Carefully let the insect outside through an open window.
- If a bee or wasp nest must be removed from your immediate work area, notify your Program Leader immediately.
- Always consult a qualified pest-removal expert.

Small Wild Animals

People and wildlife live side by side in Ontario, therefore encounters with small wild animals are common. Most small animals are not aggressive, however conflict may occur when they are trying to meet their basic needs of finding food, water and shelter. It is important to understand and recognize basic animal behaviours, in order to prevent injuries to both animals and humans.

- Never touch or handle wild animals – healthy, sick or deceased. Parasites and other infectious diseases may be present.
- Angry skunks will growl or hiss, stamp their feet rapidly, or walk a short distance on their front feet with their tails high in the air
- Before spraying, skunks usually hump their backs and turn in a U-shaped position so that the face and tail face the enemy.
- Raccoons have a natural fear of humans, and will not attack unless provoked. Their first reaction is to stop and observe, as they are cautious but curious animals.
- If bitten by a wild animal, clean the wound with soap and water, and obtain medical assistance immediately, advising medical staff of the potential for infectious diseases, such as rabies.

Bears

Bears are naturally shy, but extremely curious animals. If that curiosity is rewarded with food, they become conditioned to be increasingly forward, even aggressive. They can cause injury or death, especially if a situation involves a female and her cubs. Ultimately, bears are looking for food, and as such they should be treated with respect and tolerance. Bear attacks on humans is considered unusual, since they normally run away from any human contact.

- Confirm with your Program Leader if there have been any recent bear sightings or incidents in your work area.
- If working or patrolling an area with known bear activity, always be prepared. Carry a can of bear spray or a bear banger kit at all times.
 - Remember – the equipment will only be useful if you have it with you during an emergency.
- Do not approach a bear.
- Watch the bear, but do not make eye contact – this may be seen as a challenge.
- If it appears that a bear needs to be scared away, do it as early as possible. Use a noise maker or horn, or begin shouting.

An aggressive bear will make huffing sounds, or pop and snap their teeth together. You may also hear them ‘crashing’ through the woods or obstacles, or see them standing on a road and refusing to yield. If an aggressive bear approaches and lowers its head and faces you:

- Never turn and run, unless you have a head start and only a short distance to safety (shelter in a building, vehicle).
- Stand your ground.
- Make every effort not to panic, and assess the situation.
- Make yourself appear larger by raising your arms over your head.

- Continually face the bear and talk, growl or roar in a low-pitched voice.
- Allow escape if the bear is cornered.
- Slowly retreat by walking backwards until you can leave the area.
- Never play dead.
- Never run away.
- Never turn your back to a bear.

To report bear problems, contact the Bear Reporting Line at **1-866-514-2327**. ALWAYS notify your Program Leader if you have encountered any bears during your shift.

Additional Resources

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (CCOHS), OHS Answers: “Working Safety around Stinging Insects”: http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/biol_hazards/bees_wasps.html

Ministry of Natural Resources, Bear Wise: “What to do if you encounter a bear”: http://www.mnr.gov.on.ca/en/Business/Bearwise/2ColumnSubPage/STEL02_167730.html

Document Management

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