



Central Office: 505 Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield, CT 06109 Phone (860) 721-2822 Fax (860) 721-2823
Berlin: 240 Kensington Road, Berlin, CT 06037 Phone (860) 828-7017 Fax (860) 828-9248
Newington: 131 Cedar Street, Newington, CT 06111 Phone (860) 665-8586 Fax (860) 665-8533
Rocky Hill: 761 Old Main Street, Rocky Hill, CT 06067 Phone (860) 258-2770 Fax (860) 258-2767
www.ccthd.org

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Central Connecticut Health District Provides the “Bear” Necessities after Recent Sightings

The recent increase in black bear sightings in residential areas in Connecticut, including Newington, Rocky Hill and Wethersfield, has risen concern among locals. Fear and lack of knowledge is preventing people from spending time outdoors, thus putting a damper on summer activities. In an effort to reduce anxiety among residents, the Central Connecticut Health District is seeking to inform residents about how to prevent and what to do in the event of a bear encounter.

Black bears are typically stocky in build, with short, thick legs. At 5 to 6 feet long, they are the smallest North American bear. The coat is a glossy black or brownish-black color with a tan muzzle. These bears can leave tracks resembling those of a human, with five toes and large claws. Adult males or “boars” normally weigh 150 to 450 pounds; females, or “sows” can weigh anywhere from 110 to 250 pounds. Cubs or “yearlings” can weigh from 45 to 100 pounds.

According to the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), black bears prefer to live in wooded areas with thick vegetation, as these areas typically provide abundant food sources for these omnivorous animals. Their diet typically includes grasses, forbs, fruits, nuts and berries. They are known to eat insects, especially ants and bees, and are prone to raid bird feeders and garbage cans. Rarely, they will prey on small mammals, deer and livestock.

Black bears are very intelligent animals with an exceptional sense of smell and hearing. It can detect the slightest hint of food, which can lead these animals out of the wooded areas and towards campsites and homes. Black bears typically travel and feed at night, but can also be active during the day. Shortages in vegetation and food supply can cause bears to seek food sources outside of their normal areas. These animals are generally shy and secretive and can be fearful of humans; however, it is important to note that if these bears are fed regularly by humans or have a consistent food supply near a home, they can lose their fear of humans.

Most residents are overlooking simple, everyday things that can actually attract bears. To find out if you are attracting bears, look over the following checklist.

Do you:

- Have a bird feeder outside your home from late March through November?
- Take out your trash before the collection day, or keep it stored outdoors?
- Leave pet food outside overnight?
- Put meat or sweet-smelling fruit rinds in compost piles?
- Forget to thoroughly clean out your grill after use?

If you do one or more of these things, you may be creating an environment that a bear may see as a potential food source. It is important to remove any bird feeders from outdoor patios. Keep all trash cans tightly sealed until the morning of trash collection and pour ammonia on trash to make it unpalatable. It is ideal to let excess flavors burn off in the grill after thoroughly cooking meats, and if pet food needs to be stored outdoors, please

seal it in an air-tight container.

According to DEEP, take the following precautions to ensure your safety if you come across a bear near your home:

- Keep your distance and walk away slowly.
- If spotted near your home, keep children and pets indoors.
- **NEVER** attempt to feed/attract the bears.
- ***Call your local police department to report the bear and wait until they clear the area to resume outdoor activities.***

If you encounter a bear while walking or hiking, the following is recommended:

- Make your presence known by making noise and waving your arms.
- Keep dogs on a leash and under control, as a roaming dog may appear to be a threat to the bear and its cubs.
- Walk away slowly if you encounter a bear nearby
- **NEVER** cook food near a tent or store food inside a tent. Instead, keep food in a secure vehicle or use rope to suspend it between two trees.
- **NEVER** climb a tree, but wait in a vehicle or a building for the bear to leave the area.

For more information about black bears, please contact the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) at (860)424-3000 or by visiting www.ct.gov/deep.

Any further questions about this or any other public health issue can be directed to the Central Connecticut Health District, serving the towns of Berlin, Newington, Rocky Hill and Wethersfield by calling (860) 721-2822 or by visiting www.ccthd.org.