

Bears no match for new trash cans

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Foraging black bears will have a little tougher time scrounging up a snack on our new city trails, thanks to new bear-resistant waste receptacles.

Last week, the city installed three new Haul-All self-latching containers at trailheads on the periphery of the greenbelt. The Times caught up with parks and recreation director Scott Kenny and Bear Smart program co-ordinator Crystal McMillan, along with Dawn Boyce, director of wildlife safety systems for Bear Smart B.C., at the Log Train Trail crossing on Burde Road.

"The money for some of these containers came from the Ministry of Environment, through Bear Smart," McMillan said.

The new units have a latching lid that even a motivated bear can't foil, McMillan said.

"You see a lot of cans that have the same body shape as this, but they don't have the latching component," she explained.

The Haul-All comes with a price tag of about \$700, and to make it truly effective, must be bolted to a concrete pad.

"Otherwise, the bears will just rock it back and forth until they knock it over," McMillan said.

"We've installed three new ones, and we have a half a dozen older ones down at the works yard that we'll be installing this spring," Kenny said.

At one point, the city purchased some non-latching look-alikes that simply weren't up to the job, he said. They will be deployed elsewhere, away from active bear territory.

Kenny noted that the waste receptacles are meant for disposing of litter on public trails, and for those little goodie-bags carried by conscientious dog owners.

"But they're not for dumping your kitchen garbage," Kenny said.

To that end, many public cans are located some distance from the road, to make them less accessible for drive-and-dumps, he said.

But the city has discovered that public education and visible reminders are actually more effective.

"We've started putting Bear Smart stickers on our cans, and a reminder not to dump household garbage, and the amount we're getting has dropped off," Kenny said.

The city still has a number of old-fashioned open trash barrels, but you'll be seeing them less and less, mainly at special occasions, Kenny said.

McMillan stressed that garbage control is one of the most critical elements in avoiding bear-human confrontations. Given the choice, bears prefer their natural diet, but when there's an abundance of garbage, they will spend more time in and around human habitation, she said.

The year 2009 started with an unusually cold winter, followed by a hot summer, which proved to be good for the bear population, McMillan said.

"It was a very good year for natural food sources. There were lots of berries and there were salmon in the rivers," she said. "While there were plenty of bear sightings in populated areas, and several bears were destroyed by conservation officers, the number of hazardous confrontations was lower than past years," McMillan said.

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