

Special Considerations for Bear Country

When traveling where black bears or grizzly bears are present, camp organization and cleanliness take on a whole new significance. The primary concern here is safety, both for the visitor and for the bear. Personal safety is the first priority; a bear can be a very dangerous animal if provoked or habituated to humans. Safety of the bear is also a concern. Once a bear is habituated to people, usually because it associates people with food, it can rapidly become a "problem" bear and will have to be dealt with accordingly, often at the expense of its life.

Though black bears are usually perceived to present less of a threat to the personal safety of backcountry visitors than grizzly bears, the potential for personal injury does exist and precautions should be taken.

Messy kitchens with strong food odors and food that is readily available can attract bears. In grizzly country, kitchens should be placed at least 100 feet and down - wind of sleeping sites. Use a sump hole in the kitchen area to concentrate waste water and odors. In all bear country, avoid creating large amounts of leftover food because cooked food has a strong scent. Try to eat all leftovers promptly. If you still have leftovers, either triple - or quadruple - bag them, or burn them a bit at a time in a hot fire in a tin can. The food residues will be contained within the can, which can be stored with the food and packed out. The intent is to minimize food odors in the kitchen that may Black Bear Safety

If you hang your food, it must be at least 12 feet off the ground and four feet away from tree trunks. Wildlife carcasses and food hangs should be located 100 yards from any sleeping area, trail, or recreation site. Even with these precautions black bears, who are particularly adept at climbing, may still reach your food. Food hangs, like kitchens, should be located downwind of sleeping areas. Food brought to your tent invites danger to your sleeping areas as the bear searches for the source of the food odors.

Bear-resistant panniers and containers make food storage much easier in bear country. They are made of high-strength materials such as aircraft aluminum, with recessed lids and locking mechanisms. An approved container or pannier does not need to be hung. The Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC) will approve containers that meet specifications. Check locally for the possibility of renting such containers.

Feminine hygiene products should be triple-or quadruple bagged and packed out, or burned completely in a hot fire. In bear country, be sure to treat used sanitary products as food garbage. Leave them in the kitchen and hang them with food and trash while in camp. Under no circumstances should they be left in your personal gear, stored near sleeping areas or buried. attract a bear.

Storing food and toiletries. All food must be properly stored so as to make it unavailable and uninviting to bears. This includes canned food, pop, beer, grain and sweetened horse feed, pet food, garbage, and scented or flavored toiletries. Either hang food, or store it in bear resistant containers that may be available through local Forest Service offices.