

## **A fed bear is a dead bear**

**Teri McNeice**

Bears are constantly on the search for food and an easy meal of garbage keeps them coming back for more. Every resident of the Tri-Cities should be familiar with the catch phrase “a fed bear is a dead bear.” Once a bear has had a taste of human food it becomes aggressive in order to get more. Then an aggressive bear poses a threat to human safety, which causes them to be removed or killed. If the public is concerned with bear conservation removing all food sources is a must.

“The major reason for bear problems [has always been] food availability” said Bill Boieeie, manager of the Vector Control Program in Port Coquitlam. “Get rid of the food, especially garbage, and the bear problem is greatly reduced.” Darrell Penner, chair of the Community Safety Committee, agreed. “Bears are opportunists, if garbage is easily accessible they will take advantage and will teach their kids to do the same.”

Bear Aware, a registered trademark of British Columbia’s Conservation Foundation, has a goal “to keep bears out of our communities, thereby preventing conflicts between people and bears.” They believe that prevention of human-bear conflict can lead to a bear free community in the future. The Bear Aware website suggests that even if bears smell food in the city, they will not return if they are not rewarded by obtaining the food.

“Education is the key,” said Jodie McNeice, manager of the Community Police Stations in Port Coquitlam. “Despite brochures and website information residents are still uninformed about bears. RCMP members deal with bear intrusions on an emergency basis, and the outcome is often unpleasant. These bears would not have to be killed if people followed a few simple rules. Don’t leave garbage, pet food, or ripened fruit out, avoid improper composting, and especially stop interacting with and intentionally feeding the bears. A bear was recently spotted near the Hyde Creek Rec Center. Signs are up warning the public. We assume that it is winter and the bears are hibernating, this is not the case, we must remain vigilant all year round.”

Bear sightings have quadrupled in Port Coquitlam since the summer of 2007. Researcher William Dunn suggests that redistribution of educational material each year improves residents’ ability to retain bear policy information. It also helps inform new arrivals to the area of current policies for keeping garbage, as well as other food sources, locked and stored. Currently, our community is trying to take all these steps to reduce bear mortality and increase human safety.

“Bear conservation is a provincial issue, but garbage control is not. We are currently looking at tightening garbage bylaws” said Penner. “Currently, garbage must be put out before seven in the morning on garbage day, allowing us to leave garbage out overnight. We are looking at changing the bylaw so that you are forced to put your garbage out in the morning.”

“Management can be strengthened by adopting protocols such as marking, monitoring, and creating a database for all bears captured in association with conflict incidences” states researcher Rocky Spencer. To address this issue the city is currently applying for funding to contract a “Bear Aware Coordinator” to record and track complaints. They will provide information to the public and will be able to answer any questions the community might have about bears. Penner said that one of the coordinator’s jobs will be to “target areas of high bear activity and put warning signs on garbage cans that are left out, which may eventually lead to fines for repeat offenders.”

Bear Aware brochures are available at both the Port Coquitlam Community Police Station and Port Coquitlam City Hall. To report a bear problem call the B.C. Conservation Officer Service’s toll-free line at 1-877-952-7277 or if you are in immediate danger call 911. For more information visit [www.portcoquitlam.ca](http://www.portcoquitlam.ca) or [www.bearaware.bc.ca](http://www.bearaware.bc.ca).