

NEWS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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BLACK BEAR SAFETY REMINDERS

SUFFOLK, Virginia (February 15, 2013) – Spotting black bears in Suffolk is nothing unusual, especially considering our proximity to the Great Dismal Swamp. A black bear got a little too close for comfort, however, late Wednesday evening or early Thursday morning in the Hollywood neighborhood, located off East Washington Street, when it was foraging for food left in a vehicle overnight in the 300 block of Goodman Street, causing damage to the vehicle's hood and grill area.

Suffolk Police Officers and Animal Control Officers are visiting the affected neighborhood today to drop off safety information for residents so that they can take proper steps to protect their property.

Residents can minimize negative interactions with bears by following some simple guidelines to take now and as spring approaches:

- **Secure your garbage:** Store garbage indoors, in a shed, in a garage, or in a bear-proof container.
- **Put garbage out the morning of pick-up,** not the night before.
- **Pick up pet food.** Feed pets only what they will eat in a single feeding or feed them indoors. Remove the food bowl soon after pets finish. Pick up uneaten food. Do not leave food out overnight.
- **Remove the bird feeder:** Bears consume seed and nuts found in the wild, so bird feeders become a favored target for bears.

- **Clean the outdoor grill often.**
- **Do not put meat scraps or any other strong-smelling food in the compost pile.** Consider an enclosed compost bin.
- **Do not leave strong-smelling food in your vehicles.**
- **Pick up and remove ripe fruit** from fruit trees and surrounding grounds.

Bears are highly adaptable, intelligent animals and may learn to associate human dwellings with food. Bears are attracted to residential areas by the smell of food around homes. Black bears have a natural distrust of humans, are shy, and usually avoid people.

If addressed quickly, problems are often resolved immediately. After a few failed attempts to find food, bears will usually leave the area and return to more normal wild food items. Bears have tremendous memories and therefore, they may return for as many as 10-14 days looking for these free food sources. It is illegal to deliberately feed bears on both public and private lands.

If a bear is on or near your property, do not escalate the situation by approaching, crowding around, or chasing the bear. This also applies to bears that have climbed up a tree. The best thing you can do is **leave it alone**. Because of bears' natural distrust of humans, a bear that feels cornered will be looking for an escape route. By keeping people and pets away from the bear, you give it the best chance to come down from the tree and leave your property on its own.

If you experience a bear problem after taking appropriate steps of prevention, you may contact Suffolk Police Department non-emergency dispatch at 757-923-2350, extension 0.

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