Let's make your community safe for people and bears, especially for our kids

The West is a spectacular place to live and recreate, with a mountain backdrop, and sightings of moose, elk and deer common, with occasional bears. There is a healthy population of black bears and a growing number of grizzly bears living in the area. Let's work together to keep wildlife wild.

Let's work together as stewards of our wildlife and wildlife treasures, which has been a tradition for generations. By doing some basic bear avoidance safety protocols, we can reduce the possibility of wildlife encounters where people and wildlife may be injured. The wildlife have called the West their home for centuries and by following the listed recommendations to avoid attracting bears to our homes and communities, we can enjoy their presence and maintain community safety.

Suggestions for residential bear or cougar avoidance:

•   Walk your yard or property and ask if you have any attractants that will draw in bear, deer, or other wildlife. Remember: cougars follow deer. Bears follow their nose. Ripe fruit trees and some plants are strong attractants and should be picked and stored.

•   Ask yourself if your yard is well-lighted so when you get up in the morning or come home at night you will be able to see if there is a cougar or a bear nearby. Motion detected lights will turn on and off automatically and will also be triggered if a bear or a cougar is in your area.

•   Make sure your trash is stored in a garage, inaccessible to wildlife and taken out on the morning of pick up, not the night before.

•   When you have family activities outdoors have a trash collection site established, and return food inside as soon as possible after a meal. Make sure the trash is picked up and stored in a garage until trash day.

- If bears are frequenting your residential area, ask yourself why. What is attracting the bear?

- Use bear resistant trash containers, but remember they are an attractant and should be stored in a secure building such as a supply shed or a garage on the day of pickup.

- Birdfeeders should be used only during the winter months when birds really need the extra help getting through the winter and bears are asleep. If you want to hang birdfeeders, hang them at least 10 feet off the ground as far away from your home as possible, with a simple pulley system to lower or raise them when its time to add more seed.

- Swings and slides for kids should be placed where they can be easily watched from inside the house or within earshot, and quickly accessible for adults. Do not place them near brushy or concealing areas where a bear or a cougar might be concealed.

- Remove heavy brush along the lot line that may conceal the approach of wildlife.

- BBQ grills, coolers, bear-resistant or not, should be stored in outbuildings or garages until needed.

Pets:

Pets need a little extra care. They often don't know what bears, cougars and moose are and how aggressively they will protect their young. Safety pointers include:

- Do not let pets run freely where they may encounter a bear, cougar, moose or even deer.

- Outside pets should be fed during the day, with feeding bowls taken inside so there are no pet foods lingering outside to attract wildlife.

- If your pet is acting strangely and does not want to go outside, do not force it. This may be an indication that there is a bear or cougar nearby.

Walking the neighborhood:

- Take a flashlight and your bear spray. Walk with a friend.

- Stay on well-lit pathways.

For more information contact Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks.

Check your local hardware and feed store for information about electric fencing and other animal deterrent and resistant products.

BeBearAware.org

PO Box 7487
Missoula, MT 59807
Phone: 406-239-2315
Email: bearinfo@cfwi.org

www. facebook.com/ bebearaware

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Visit us online for more resources on bear avoidance, bear spray, and bear safety!