



Bear Spray Practice Leader Resource Sheet

Introduction

Many Scouts have carried bear spray, but not actually used it. In an actual bear encounter, they may hesitate or simply not follow the right steps. In this activity, leaders review the proper way to use bear spray and then let scouts practice in a location where there is no possibility of accidentally exposing someone else to the spray or the fumes from the bear spray, which can travel quite a distance if windy. This activity is flexible. You can go over other bear information (how to tell a Grizzly from a Black Bear) and have them practice the defensive ground position for bear attacks, or just practice the spraying.

Safety

Bear Spray is not specifically covered in the Guide to Safe Scouting. This means that leaders should use the Sweet 16 BSA Safety Checklist. The guidance in this Leader Resource covers those points, but if you are not familiar with this list, take time to read it as it is excellent safety guidance.

www.scouting.org/health-and-safety/resources/sweet16/

If you think your Scouts are not mature enough to fire real bear spray OR if you do not have a good location for this activity, then you can purchase inert bear spray canisters. According to the literature, the inert cans don't have quite the kick of real bear spray, but it is still good training.

It is probable, and not entirely undesirable for older youth, that scouts will get a "whiff" of bear spray once it is in the air. Be prepared for this. Have water handy. Set your practice area up considering wind direction and have everyone stand up-wind. It is educational to know what the effects of bear spray are on you because in a real situation, you are likely to be exposed to the agent and so Scouts will know just a bit what to expect. See first aid instructions, and never rub your eyes or touch your face when handling bear spray cans or if exposed to bear spray. It makes it worse.

Instructions

1. First teach the elements of Bear Spray Safety.
 - a. Always point nozzle away from yourself and others. Avoid discharging into the wind.
 - b. Wear eye protection (like sunglasses) if possible.
 - c. Fire for 0.5 seconds at the effective range of 25-30 feet.
 - i. The spray can be difficult to control, so warn Scouts to expect a kick and keep the can pointed slightly down.
 - d. First Aid:
 - i. If skin contact occurs, thoroughly wash affected area with soap and water.
 - ii. If eye or mouth irradiation occurs, flush with gentle stream of running water for 15 minutes.

- e. Thoroughly wash hands with soap and water and wipe off the cannisters.
 - f. Remove and wash contaminated clothing as soon as possible.
 - g. When carrying bear spray:
 - i. Remove the cable tie on the cannister.
 - ii. Carry where you can easily reach it (not in a backpack)
 - iii. Do not remove the safety clip until you are ready to fire the spray.
 - h. When transporting bear spray:
 - i. Make sure the safety clip is on.
 - ii. Avoid extreme temperatures. See bear spray packaging for details.
 - iii. Put in a container, so in the event of discharge, the spray doesn't contaminate the vehicle.
 - i. If you use bear spray:
 - i. Get out of area as soon as possible. Bear spray is initially a deterrent, but then can attract bears.
 - ii. Report the bear incident to Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (FWP).
2. Shooting Bear Spray Instructions.
- a. Mark a course of 100 feet, 50 feet, and 25 feet so that Scouts can visualize the distances.
 - i. Bear spray residue will linger for a couple weeks. Make sure the area you choose will not harm people or allow bear spray residue to carry via the wind to inhabited areas.
 - b. Have the scout put the canister on their belt (or how they would carry it, to practice getting the canister out and the safety off when the "see the bear").
 - c. You can modify this, but this gives you an idea.
 - i. Leader says BEAR to indicate bear is at 100 feet.
 - 1. Scouts gets ready.
 - ii. Bear Charges NOW!
 - iii. Bears travel up to 35 MPH, which is 50 feet-per-second. A bear charging at 100 feet will be at bear spray range in about 1 second.
 - iv. Leader says if bear is leaving or still there (so should they fire again).
 - d. How to shoot the spray:
 - i. Angle slightly down.
 - ii. 0.5 second burst. If bear continues, fire again.
 - iii. Adjust for wind if possible.
 - e. Advanced option: The spray doesn't work, and the grizzly keeps coming. Practice going to the ground, spread arms and legs in a defensive position.

Equipment

You don't need much equipment

- Expired bear spray canisters
- Tape measure (to mark the course)
 - A person can stand at the 100 feet mark to show where the bear is.
 - Use something on the ground to indicate 50- and 25-foot distance.

- Eye Wash or Access to Water: This is a good safety precaution in the even someone does get it in their eyes.
- Hand Washing Access: Do right after the activity.
- Eye protection is helpful. This can be sunglasses.

References

US Geological Survey Bear Safety Sheet:

<https://pubs.usgs.gov/fs/2009/3018/pdf/FS09-3018.pdf>

Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks Bear Spray Safety:

<http://fwp.mt.gov/recreation/safety/wildlife/bears/bearSpray.html>