Black Bear Kills Driller

A driller working alone in a remote mining exploration camp was killed when a black bear attacked him.

The driller and his crew had been in the area for several weeks and had not seen any bears. Their camp was clean and well-maintained.

On the night of the attack, a helicopter pilot had flown the victim to a mountain area in an unsuccessful attempt to establish radio contact with home. On their way back to the main camp, the victim asked the pilot to drop him off at a drilling platform so he could run a water line down to another drill site in preparation for the night shift. The pilot saw no reason to refuse the request, so he left him there alone.

Two hours later, two workers arrived at the drill platform area to start the night shift. They found the victim's backpack on the trail near a roll of hose. They walked to the drill site and cautiously climbed onto the drill rig, where they found blood. An aggressive black bear appeared. The two workers managed to scare it away by running a chainsaw and burning a torch.

They found the body of the driller 30 feet from the platform. At daylight the bear was located and shot. Human remains were found inside the animal. The black bear had been healthy and had probably never seen a human before. He may have been headed toward the main camp, attracted by the smell of fish frying, when he encountered the worker and stalked him as food.

Black bears and grizzly bears pose a serious threat to workers in remote areas. There is some safety in numbers, so don't work alone. Radios to call for help and warn others of the presence of bears can help save lives. Employers, contractors and workers in wilderness regions should become familiar with techniques of preventing bear attacks. Chemical substances which repel bears, and noise to alert them to human presence and frighten them away also have proven effective in some instances. If you are entering bear country to work or for recreational activities, understand the risks and how to minimize them.