

FATALGRAM 17-01

Alaska Department of Labor & Workforce Development
Division of Labor & Safety Standards
Occupational Safety & Health



Date of incident: June 18, 2017

Industry: General Mine Exploration

Location: POGO mining district, Big Delta, AK.

Description of Accident: A black bear attacked and killed a field biologist while she was collecting samples. The crew of two biologists were walking together with backpacks to obtain soil samples at a remote mining exploration area near Big Delta, Alaska. The two workers were experienced field biologists with past bear training and bear encounter experience. The workers carried no guns but each had a canister of bear spray and radio communications. During the sample collection, a black bear charged and attacked the workers. The bear knocked one aside and fatally mauled the other.

Accident Prevention Recommendations:

- Ensure that each remote worker has access to medical services appropriate to the hazards of the work being conducted.
- Ensure that employees are trained and qualified to work in remote areas. The training should include emergency communications and medical evacuation scenarios.
- Consider accompanying armed bear guards in high-density bear country.
- Ensure that proper coordinates are known for remote workers for a rapid response and evacuation from wildlife, wildfire, or other hazardous conditions where workers may need a quick response. Keep workers apprised of hazards in the field.
- When equipment for wildlife deterrent is present, such as firearms or spray, ensure that it is located in easily accessible areas on the employee and not stowed in a pack or otherwise inaccessible in an emergency.