



Pathology & Biology Section – 2008

G96 Bear Facts Alaska: The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly

Kathleen Day, MA, MS, University of Alaska, Anchorage, PO Box 670276, Chugiak, AK 99567; and Franc Fallico, MD, Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, State of Alaska, 4500 South Boniface Parkway, Anchorage, AK 99567*

After attending this presentation participants will understand characteristic trauma patterns found in fatal bear maulings, how these patterns relate to bear etiology in the wild and the latest research about and how to avoid bear attacks. The presentation will include autopsy results from highly publicized attacks, as well as those that are less well known looking at data from all species of bears.

This presentation will impact the forensic community/humanity by providing the latest information on bear fatality trauma and pathology with data accumulated by wildlife biologists in a synthesized fashion. It will provide the forensic community with a model of the injury patterns that are found in fatal bear attacks and hopefully help in the prevention of future attacks.

There has not been much forensic research conducted in the realm of bear fatal bear maulings and attacks. Because human development continues to encroach on natural habitats the numbers of bear-human encounters appear to be on the increase. A review of the literature consists mainly of brief case studies or papers that have been written in past decades in the context of emergency medicine or wildlife biology. Although being fatally mauled by a bear may be at the fringes of popular forensic science, these deaths usually enter the realm of forensic pathologists either because the death is unattended, suspicious or gets attention from the media. Because of these reasons, pathologists should have an understanding of injury patterns and a general understanding of why they occur. Biologists have contributed a great deal of data to aid pathologists in explaining why particular injuries occur. It is hoped that when fatal bear injuries are carefully documented and analyzed, pathologists can reciprocate and help biologists better understand bear species behavior with the goal of preventing further deaths.

Numerous case studies of bear mauling injury patterns found at autopsy are presented as well as the most recent scientific data from biologists that examine the specific nature of bear-human interactions and the best way to avoid them.

Bear Fatality, Trauma Patterns, Etiology