

Opinion: Reinforce doors, windows to keep bears out

By Dan Sheehan

Lake Tahoe is certainly a beautiful area with its magnificent alpine lake like no other. The Lake Tahoe Basin also has some great wildlife. The black bear or *Ursus americanus* is a longtime indigenous resident of the area and has become a controversial topic of debate around the lake.

There is plenty of food in the wild for the bears; and many bears eat nothing but wild food. However, some of those bears whose territory borders (and encases) the human neighborhoods are the ones of discussion. These bears have been lured in over the years by tourists and residents who are careless and uneducated about wildlife. Garbage left unsecured or doors and windows left open with food wafting about has been the enticing draw.

Once a bear has learned that the big boxes in the middle of the woods (we call them houses) are a place where food is available, it is pretty tough to stop them from getting in. Momma bear may smell the food and teaches baby bear that this is where we can forage. So this baby bear grows up learning to break into homes regardless if it has the smell of food or not.

It is our responsibility to try and reverse this trend that we are primarily responsible for. Educating ourselves and others about these awesome animals is paramount. The BEAR League is a nonprofit whose sole purpose is to educate and help people live alongside bears. They do so through constant education and intervention.

I have been in the Tahoe area for the past 19 years full time and on and off for the past 46 years and have seen and

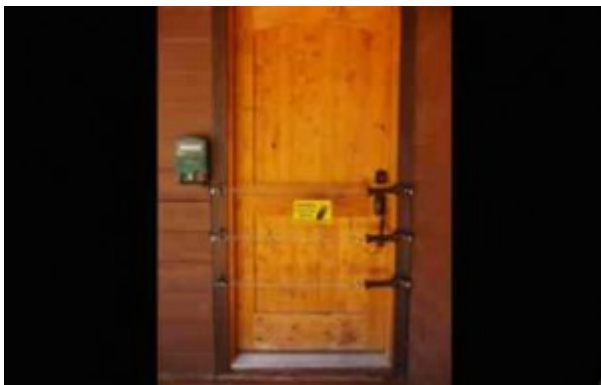
encountered many bears in the wild and in the home. As a master carpenter I have been called to fix many doors over the years due to bears seeking entry into the home. I am pretty good at rebuilding a door jam to be extremely strong. However, a 600-pound bear leaning on most any door is going to reveal the door's weakness sooner or later.

And now the local Ursus has become very proficient in breaking windows as well.

So this has led me and others to modify typical electric fencing components as seen on the farm or ranch to work on a home. For the past three years I have been installing these systems and found that they are the absolute most effective solution to deterring bears from getting inside.

The systems pulse about 10,000 volts through the wires. For comparison, a police taser is about 50,000 volts. The amperage is very low (less than one-tenth of an amp). It is amps which kill. Because the charge is pulsing it allows for the muscle reaction of retraction from the fence. If it were not pulsing and you were to grab your muscles, would contract and not allow you to retract. It is this pulsing which also makes it next to impossible for the fence to be a fire hazard. It is also important to note that the electric fence system is safe to the bears, children, pets and other small animals.

This is what a typical door installation looks like:



The green box is the control or energizer that supplies the

power to the system and creates the “pulse.” The springs across the door have a handle on one side which can be ‘unhooked” The springs then simply retract and rest out of the way to the other side.

This is a typical window set-up:



We use a polypropylene twine that is very strong and has nine stainless steel strands braided through it that carry the electrical current.

Tahoe Electric Bear Fencing makes sure that the fences we install are effective first and foremost. Our systems are the absolute least obtrusive of anything on the market. More important, our systems are configured so they are not only extremely easy to use but can always be used with minimal effort while you are inside. Other systems either do not allow you to enable the system while you are home or if they do it is burdensome.

Because our systems are the least obtrusive of all the

systems, we highly discourage a “removable” system. Please do not be sold by the idea of a removable system. Once you start removing the wires you become less inclined to replace them when you leave the house to go out to lunch or take the dog for a walk. Our systems are always on the house and are extremely simple to engage at all times.

If you have a bear emergency or questions please call the BEAR League at (530) 525.7297.

For inquiries about electric fencing for your home or securing your home call Tahoe Electric Bear Fencing (DS Construction) at (530) 448.9127.

Dan Sheehan is the owner of DS Construction and Tahoe Electric Bear Fencing. He is also a volunteer with the BEAR League and Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care. Sheehan has been trained in the handling of wild birds and animals.