

# Tolerance diminishes for letting bears eat trash

By Kathryn Reed

Bear boxes on the South Shore may become more common because of potential enforcement of those who leave trash out for critters and a loan program that is being contemplated.

The Waste Management Joint Powers Authority on Thursday ironed out some details about the ordinance that this summer is expected to be voted on by the jurisdictions that make up that body – South Lake Tahoe, El Dorado County and Douglas County. The ordinance would only affect the South Shore area of the counties that is serviced by South Tahoe Refuse.

The ordinance the JPA is putting together mimics much of what the counties have on the books. One major difference still to be resolved is El Dorado County requires bear boxes be installed during new construction or a major remodel, while the other entities don't have this rule.

“The city doesn't want to punish people who aren't doing anything wrong,” JoAnn Conner, South Lake Tahoe's rep on the JPA board, said in regards to not wanting a blanket mandate for residents to have bear containers.

Conner wants there to be an appeal process in case a neighbor ran over the trash can or something like that where the resident with the violation didn't actually create the problem.



Not always is a bear box big enough for all the garbage.

Photo/LTN

New regulations would likely require a homeowner who has a second violation in a two-year period be required to have a bear-resistant receptacle. That won't necessarily mean a bear box.

STR officials are tasked with coming up with a list of containers that would deter bears from getting into the garbage.

"We think many times people don't know they have a problem because we clean it up," Jeff Tillman, president of STR, said May 28. "We need an education component."

The refuse company is going to devise a flyer that it will send to all of its customers about the consequences of bears in trash. The JPA board will review it before it is mailed.

Any fines levied will be tied to the property, with liens placed on it.

STR employees have the ability to photograph a problem residence. That information can then be forwarded to officials in that city or county, with the jurisdiction then responsible for issuing a warning on the first violation and mandate a container after the second infraction.

Clean Tahoe is also cleaning up the streets on the California

side where critters have gotten into trash. In March there were 38 such cases in the city and six in El Dorado County.

Catherine Cecchi, who runs Clean Tahoe, said she believes an ordinance like the one being drafted will help to drastically reduce the number of calls her workers respond to. When it comes to who the culprits are Cecchi said it's a mixed bag of offenders – locals, tourists, second homeowners.

The JPA agreed to alter how those offenders are billed so Clean Tahoe can recoup what it is charged by STR to dump the "bear" trash it picks up.

For those residents serviced by STR who want a bear box it may be possible to buy one through a loan program. Tom Bruen, counsel for the JPA, is looking at the program Placer County adopted earlier this spring that allows residents to buy a bear box for about \$1,200, pay it back over five years, with a one-time administrative fee of \$120, but zero interest.

The JPA board likes this idea and directed Bruen to come back with a more concrete plan.

While board member Conner said she hears people don't want bear boxes all over town, Sue Novasel, representing El Dorado County and the president of the Lake Tahoe Wildlife Care board, said her constituents tell her the opposite. She said personally she is an advocate of the containers. Nancy McDermid, Douglas County's rep on the JPA, concurred with Novasel.

Novasel called the whole bear in trash issue a people problem.