

Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee

Bear-Resistant Products

Testing Program



*Photo courtesy of the Living with Wildlife Foundation
and the Grizzly & Wolf Discovery Center*

Testing Protocol



March 2014

Introduction

Increasing numbers of humans are encountering grizzly and black bears while living in or visiting areas inhabited by bears. In some cases, these encounters lead to conflicts between humans and bears, which can end poorly for both species. One way to significantly reduce the likelihood of human-bear encounters is to ensure that bears do not become conditioned to anthropogenic food sources.

The Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC) was formed in 1983 to help ensure recovery of viable grizzly bear populations and their habitat in the lower 48 states through interagency coordination of policy, planning, management and research. The IGBC consists of representatives from the USDA Forest Service (USFS), the National Park Service, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Geological Survey and representatives of the state wildlife agencies of Idaho, Montana, Washington and Wyoming. In the interest of international coordination and cooperation, the Canadian Wildlife Service is also represented. IGBC's goal of grizzly bear recovery is enhanced by addressing issues that can result in bears being removed from the population. Toward this end, decreasing the availability of attractants such as human food and garbage is an important means of achieving IGBC's goal of reducing bear/human conflicts.

In 1989 the IGBC developed the first consistent protocol for defining, testing and recommending minimum design standards for bear-resistant containers (USFS 1989). Over the past two decades, much progress has been made relative to products used for securing bear attractants. Manufacturers and agency personnel have taken the lead in developing better products for securing food, garbage and other bear attractants and there is now a wide variety of bear-resistant product options available to consumers. The USFS administers the bear-resistant products testing and approval program on behalf of the IGBC.

Program Purpose

The purposes of the IGBC Bear-Resistant Products Testing Program are to:

- 1) Evaluate products for use in grizzly bear habitat on public lands in the lower 48 states that have applicable food storage regulations. Such regulations may vary, so the public is encouraged to check with the specific public land management unit in which they are interested.
- 2) Encourage the use of bear-resistant equipment on private lands where there are no regulations mandating bear-resistant storage.
- 3) Provide information to the public and to agency personnel to facilitate informed decisions when purchasing bear-resistant products.

This program provides a means of evaluating the relative effectiveness of a wide range of products used to secure potential bear attractants. The intent of this bear-resistant products testing program is to approve products that minimize easy and direct access to attractants by grizzly bears. The testing program helps prevent ineffective products from being placed into use. It also accommodates the development of new and improved bear-resistant products and options for deterring bears. Information gained from this program through product testing and evaluation is used to provide consistent and professional guidance to the public and to agency personnel.

If a product appears on the list of IGBC-approved bear-resistant products, it means that the commercially-available product has met minimum standards related to the effort that must be expended by grizzly bears to access the container's contents. Under this IGBC program, no live-bear testing has been conducted utilizing other species of captive bears (e.g., no black bears or polar bears). The IGBC standards were established through consultation with North American human-bear conflict experts and bear biologists. Please note that IGBC approval does not assert that these products are bear-proof and does not guarantee that the containers will never be accessed by bears. IGBC approval also does not guarantee that small amounts of the contents of the containers won't be able to leak or spill out. In conjunction with properly utilizing certified bear-resistant products, the IGBC strongly encourages people living or recreating in grizzly bear

habitat to take personal responsibility for maintaining a high level of diligence in their sanitation and attractant storage to further minimize the chance of a human/bear conflict.

Testing Procedures and Approval Criteria

This bear-resistant product testing protocol pertains to food storage and garbage containment products that are commercially available. Products not manufactured and sold commercially that are made only for personal use to comply with food storage orders on public lands can be evaluated through the IGBC's courtesy inspection program. This document does not address that separate process. Please contact the IGBC at igbc@igbconline.org or the USFS at 406-329-3664 for more information about the courtesy inspection program.

Manufacturers submitting products for testing must follow the directions and provide the information as described in the "How to Submit a Product for Testing" document available on the IGBC website (www.igbconline.org) under the "Arranging to Have a Product Tested" tab. Only one prototype of each model will be tested. If the prototype fails the test, it can be modified and re-tested.

If there are multiple models in a line/series of products that differ only in size (i.e., construction materials and component designs are the same), it may be possible to test the smallest and the largest containers in the product line; then if both of those models pass, the intermediate sizes could be considered for approval without having to be submitted for testing. Some products types may not be appropriate for this type of assessment. This situation will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Please contact the USFS at 406-329-3664 if interested.

To comply with this protocol, commercially available products require completion of a visual inspection and a live-bear test. Testing fees are charged for the testing of commercially available products. A schedule of testing fees is available on the IGBC website (www.igbconline.org) under the "Arranging to Have a Product Tested" tab.

Visual Inspection

Product components (i.e., latches, hinges, lids, coverings, openings, etc.) that might allow a bear to gain entry by breaking, bending, tearing, biting, or pulling with its claws or teeth will be visually inspected. Products will be inspected to ensure that they are clean and free of loose parts and debris, or sharp edges, corners or points that may be harmful to humans or the captive test bears. Test personnel reserve the right to refuse testing of products which may be dangerous for the captive test bears (e.g., containers that have sharp edges, protrusions, loose parts, extremely heavy lids, etc.). Photographs of products will be taken during the visual inspection prior to the live-bear test. Products that pass the visual inspection will then undergo a live-bear test.

Live Grizzly Bear Test

The live-bear test will utilize captive grizzly bears at an IGBC-approved facility. The Grizzly & Wolf Discovery Center in West Yellowstone, Montana is the only facility approved for this purpose by the IGBC at this time. Live grizzly bear testing will be conducted as follows:

- Testing personnel will prepare containers by placing an appropriate attractant (i.e., food item) inside the container. Containers which do not rely on an odor-proof barrier or liner may also have an attractant (i.e., honey, peanut butter, fish oil, etc.) applied to the outside of the product.
- Testing personnel will ensure that containers are closed and securely latched, knotted or padlocked, as appropriate.
- Products will be placed inside the bear enclosure and bears will be allowed to interact with the containers. Products may undergo contact by a number of bears of various sizes and with varying levels of experience with containers.
- Manufacturers/vendors submitting large containers (e.g., dumpsters, food storage lockers, etc.) that must be secured to a concrete pad will provide testing personnel with product specifications, installation instructions and a list of tools needed to properly install and operate the product. Products not intended to be secured to a concrete pad will be placed on the ground in the bear enclosure for the test.

- Testing personnel will monitor and video all product testing. Photos and video footage will be archived by the IGBC for a period of five years after testing.
- Products will remain in the bear enclosure and accessible to bears until breached or until a total of 60 minutes of bear contact time has been reached. Bear contact is defined as biting, clawing, pounding, rolling, compressing, licking, chewing or scratching by the captive test bear(s).
- A container will be considered to have been breached if it is rendered non-functional, or if the hinges, seams, lids or doors are torn or broken and the bear gains access at any of these points. For garbage containment products, gaps, tears or holes of 1½ inches or less are allowable. For food storage products, gaps, tears or holes of ¼ inch or less are allowable.
- If the product is not breached within the required 60 minutes of bear contact time, it will be considered to have "passed" the live-bear test.
- Test personnel will photograph products after testing has been completed.
- Descriptions of areas where a product fails, if any, will be made on the product testing form and this information will be made available to the manufacturer/vendor upon request.
- Live-bear testing of products will be conducted between April 1st and October 31st. The testing facility may decline products prior to November 1st and after March 31st due to circumstances that would adversely affect product testing (e.g., inclement weather, excessive snow accumulations, etc.).
- Bear-resistant products submitted for testing become the property of the designated testing facility if appropriate arrangements for disposition haven't been made within 60 days after product testing.
- Manufacturers/vendors wishing to obtain an SD card of testing video must notify the testing facility at the time products are submitted for testing. There will be an additional and separate fee charged for copies of video footage. Video footage is not edited. Requests for testing videos made after the testing process has been completed will not be honored. Please see additional information available on the IGBC website (www.igbconline.org) under the "Arranging to Have a Product Tested" tab.

Product Approval and Reporting of Testing Results

A final review of product documentation and test results by the authorized USFS bear-resistant product approver or designated official will determine if the product will be IGBC-approved as bear-resistant.

IGBC approval applies only to the specific products as tested. **If a product's design and/or specifications change, such as by altering materials, dimensions, hinges, latches, or other features of the container, the product will likely require re-testing and re-approval.**

Contact the USFS bear-resistant product approver for testing of modified products (please see end of this document for contact information).

Upon completion of testing:

- Manufacturers/vendors will be notified if their product passes or fails the IGBC requirements for bear-resistant products.
- Manufacturers/vendors that submitted products that pass the live-bear test and are approved as IGBC bear-resistant will receive an approval letter and a unique IGBC certification number. This number is applicable only to the specific product model approved. The approval letter will provide instructions for proper display of the certification number on the approved product. The IGBC certification number may be etched, molded, stamped, or otherwise embossed, stickered or labeled onto the approved product.

The official list of IGBC-approved bear-resistant products appears on the IGBC web site: <http://www.igbconline.org/>. If a specific product does not appear on this list, it is not considered to be an IGBC-approved bear-resistant product.

Program Disclaimers

- The IGBC and associated partners are not responsible for damage to products that are submitted for testing and are not responsible for negative testing outcomes.

- The IGBC reserves the right to rescind the “certified bear-resistant” status of any or all products listed on their website due to failure in the field, changes to product specifications, or other issues.
- Manufacturers/vendors agree to let testing personnel determine which bears will be used for product testing and if and when an adequate test has occurred.
- IGBC approval of a bear-resistant product means these products meet IGBC bear-resistant design and structural standards, but it is not a guarantee that a grizzly bear cannot gain entry into these products.
- IGBC approval of a bear-resistant product is not a guarantee that a grizzly bear can’t cause small amounts of the contents in the approved products to leak or spill.
- The use of bear-resistant products is meant to complement, but not be a substitute for, following proper sanitation and attractant storage techniques for safety when in bear habitat. More information related to this topic can be found on the IGBC website (www.igbconline.org) under the “Safety in Grizzly Country” tab.
- Manufacturers/vendors concerned about confidentiality of new product designs should alert testing personnel. Testing personnel will make every effort to ensure confidentiality of product information. Neither the testing facility nor the IGBC are responsible for breach of such information.
- Manufacturers/vendors should be aware that the IGBC is required to release information related to product testing and results of product tests to the public when requested under the Freedom of Information Act. This does not apply to proprietary information related to product designs or patents.
- Program administrators reserve the right to review and modify this protocol as needed or to refuse to test certain products.

Contacts for Additional Information

To Arrange for Product Testing:

Randy Gravatt
Grizzly & Wolf Discovery Center
406-646-7003
800-257-2570
randyg@grizzlydiscoveryctr.com

Approval and Status of IGBC-Approved Products:

Scott Jackson
U.S. Forest Service
406-329-3664
sjackson03@fs.fed.us

Additional information relevant to this program that may be useful can be found on the IGBC website (www.igbconline.org), including under the “Product Testing FAQs” tab.

Reference cited:

USDA Forest Service. 1989. Bear Resistant Containers - Minimum Design and Structural Standards; Inspection and Testing Methodology. Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee. 35 pp.