

## **Bear Buffer Zone Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Why is it important that we take measures to reduce bears' access to attractants?**

- Missoula is bear country. It is important that we as a community take steps to prevent conflicts between humans and bears. Garbage attracts bears and is the most common cause of conflict. By using bear resistant containers, we can limit bear's ability to access garbage.

### **Why does garbage attract bears? What's the harm?**

- Garbage can be an easy meal for bears. They will frequent areas for these easy meals and can cause damage to property or cause serious injury to you and others. Problem bears may have to be put down.

### **It's May 1<sup>st</sup> and I don't have a can yet? What am I supposed to do?**

- Delays in the supply of bear-resistant cans mean not all neighborhoods will get cans right away. In fact, it could take 6 months or longer. We are working with Grizzly, Republic, and Bear Biologists to first deliver cans to areas of highest concern. Whether you've received your can or not, it is your responsibility as a resident of the Bear Buffer Zone to properly secure your trash so bears do not have easy access.

### **When did this regulation change?**

- The Health Board, County Commissioners and City Council approved changes to the Health Code in 2023. Effective April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2026, bear resistant containers or enclosures are required in all areas of the Bear Buffer Zone.

### **What do I need to do to get a bear-resistant container?**

- If you use a can from your garbage hauler, they will contact you or automatically change your container to a bear-resistant container. Grizzly Disposal and Republic Services have multiple size options. Do not overfill your container! It is only bear-resistant if it is properly latched.

### **How much will it cost me?**

- The haulers have informed us it will be an additional charge for the bear-resistant containers. Please contact your hauler to get your exact rate.

### **Can I leave the bear-resistant container out on the street the night before trash service?**

- Bear-resistant containers can be set out no more than 12 hours before collection and must be taken back from the road within 8 hours after collection. This does not apply to alleys. In alleys the container may be left out as long as they are latched and not accessible to bears.

### **I use my own can (and/or I only take it out on trash day), do I still need to get a bear-resistant container?**

- If you live in the Bear Buffer Zone, you must use an Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC) approved container. Alternatively, you may store cans in an approved bear-resistant enclosure.

### **I want to build an enclosure for my containers; how do I get the enclosure approved?**

- Contact Montana FWP Bear Biologist, Jamie Jonkel at 406-544-1447 or at JaJonkel@mt.gov to get the enclosure approved. They also have blueprints for building new enclosures.

### **Can a dumpster be bear-resistant?**

- Yes, haulers have dumpsters that have been pre-approved. Alternatively, a bear-resistance enclosure can be built around the dumpster. Contact FWP for blueprint of bear-resistance dumpster enclosures.

### **What about recycling?**

- Recyclables are not required to be in a bear-resistant container, as long as they are clean, stored indoors, or screened from public view and in a closed container.

### **What about compost?**

- We ask people to place their compost out for collection as close to collection time as possible and bring their containers back inside as soon as they can. Missoulacompost.com has bear resistant compost containers available.

# You live in Phase 3 of the Bear Buffer Zone.

Starting April 30th, 2026 all garbage must be stored in a bear resistant container or bear resistant enclosure.



Bear resistant containers must be certified by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC) or approved by a Montana FWP bear management team biologist.

Under the new rules, a standard garbage container cannot be used unless it is in an approved bear resistant enclosure that is directly accessible by the hauler.

## **Don't overfill your container**

**Containers must be fully closed with the lid latched.**

Bear resistant containers only work if bears can't access the garbage.

Bear resistant containers can be put out for collection the night before pickup, but they must be brought back from the road within 8 hours of collection.

However, containers can be left out in alleys as long as they are latched and not accessed by bears.

If you already lease a container from your hauler, they will contact you or automatically change it out as containers become available.

If you would like to purchase your own IGBC certified bear resistant container, you may purchase them online. Contact your hauler to ensure the container is compatible with their equipment.

**Call your current hauler before you buy!**  
**Grizzly Disposal      Republic Services**  
**(406) 541-7171      (406) 543-3157**

For a list of approved products scan the QR code or visit the link below



<https://igbconline.org/programs/bear-%20resistant-products/>



**Most human-bear conflicts are caused by unsecured garbage or other food sources.**

**These rules are in place to reduce human-bear conflicts and to protect people, property and bears.**

Numerous black bears live in and around the Missoula Valley. In recent years, grizzlies have become more common. Bears are attracted to the area, because it's easy to find food here. Once bears become conditioned to eating garbage, they may have to be relocated or euthanized to keep us safe. Even then, new bears will move in if unsecured garbage is still available.

For more information on the Bear Buffer Zone or to report a bear sighting scan the QR code or visit the link below <https://missoulabears.org/>



**How to use your bear resistant can**

**Northland Products**

Swipe the latch left to right with your index finger and lift the lid with your other hand



**Toter**

Squeeze the lock and lift the lid with your other hand



**If you have questions about these rules, contact Missoula Public Health at [envhealth@missoulacounty.us](mailto:envhealth@missoulacounty.us) or (406) 258-4755**