

## National Elk Refuge News – July 20, 2009

### *Training Increases Safety for Visitors*



*Jackson Hole Fire/EMS instructors Chris Steele and Judy Kortum demonstrate placement of AED electrical pads on a manikin.*

Two local agencies provided staff training at the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center this past month, focusing on increasing safety for the visiting public.

Like many public facilities where large groups of people gather, the visitor center has an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) centrally located in the building. An AED is a portable electronic device that can be used if someone falls victim to sudden cardiac

arrest. The machine is designed to be simple for the general public to use. However, few visitor staff members had ever been trained on its application.

Earlier this month, two members of the Jackson Hole Fire/EMS demonstrated setting up and activating an AED. Though a fire station and ambulance bay are located within a quick response time from the facility, visitor center staff could greatly increase a patient's chances of survival

during a cardiac arrest emergency by using the machine after calling for emergency medical assistance. The busy center averages 300,000 visitors per year.

After the emergency medical presentation, Mark Gocke from the Wyoming Game and Fish Department discussed bear encounters and demonstrated the use of pepper spray with an inert training canister. Area hikers can encounter black bears on trails or in developed sites such

as campgrounds and lake shores. So far this season, there has been an increase in the number of frontcounty grizzly bear sightings as their range has expanded further south. Grizzlies have been spotted several times this summer in the Grand Teton National Park headquarters area, near the popular Craig Thomas Discovery and Visitor Center and along the new multi-use pathway. “It’s not just hikers that have seen grizzly bears,” Gocke explained. “Their proximity to visitor service areas increases the likelihood that any recreationist or visitor can have a bear encounter.”



*Mark Gocke holds a canister of pepper spray while discussing the effectiveness of the repellent.*

After listening to an explanation of the effectiveness of the spray and important safety considerations regarding its use, visitor center staff had an opportunity to activate an inert canister. “I always carry a can with me when I hike, but I’ve never actually sprayed one,” said National Elk Refuge volunteer Steve Miller, who works two days a week at the visitor center.

Staff are frequently asked by visitors whether or not they should purchase pepper spray during their stay in the valley. “We all agreed that it’s not really our position to automatically say yes or no,” Miller summarized. “It clearly is a personal choice. However, we’re now more informed about the product and are in a better position to answer questions about its use and increase safety for our visitors.”



*National Elk Refuge volunteer Judy Stoutenborough watches a cloud of inert pepper spray disperse.*