



County of San Diego
Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measures

Bee Alert - Africanized Honey Bee Facts

Africanized honey bees (AHB)--also called "killer bees"--are established in parts of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada and California. Although the killer reputation has been greatly exaggerated, the presence of AHB increases the chances of people being stung. Learning about the AHB and taking certain precautions can lower the risk of being injured by this new insect in our environment.

The Africanized honey bee is closely related to the European honey bee used in agriculture for crop pollination and honey production. The two types of bees look the same and their behavior is similar in many respects. Neither is likely to sting when gathering nectar and pollen from flowers, but both will sting in defense if provoked. A swarm of bees in flight or briefly at rest seldom bothers people. However, all bees become defensive when they settle, begin producing wax comb and raising young.

Africanized and European Bees:

- Look the same
- Protect their nests and sting in defense
- Can sting only once
- Have the same venom
- Pollinate flowers
- Produce honey and wax

Africanized honey bees are less predictable and more defensive than European honey bees. They are more likely to defend a greater area around their nest. They respond faster in greater numbers, although each bee can sting only once.

Africanized Honey Bees:

- Respond quickly and sting in large numbers
- Can sense a threat from people or animals 50 feet or more from nest
- Sense vibrations from power equipment 100 feet or more from nest
- Will pursue an enemy 1/4 mile or more
- Swarm frequently to establish new nests
- Nest in small cavities and sheltered areas

AHB nest in many locations where people may encounter them. Nesting sites include: empty boxes, cans, buckets or other containers; old tires; infrequently used vehicles; lumber piles; holes and cavities in fences, trees or the ground; sheds, garages and other outbuildings; and low decks or spaces under buildings. Remove potential nest sites around buildings. Be careful wherever bees may be found.

General Precautions

- Listen for buzzing indicating a nest or swarm of bees
- Use care when entering sheds or outbuildings where bees may nest
- Examine work area before using lawn mowers, weed cutters and other power equipment
- Examine areas before tying up or penning pets or livestock
- Be alert when participating in all outdoor sports and activities
- Don't disturb a nest or swarm--contact a pest control company or an emergency response organization
- Teach children to be cautious and respectful of all bees
- Check with a doctor about bee sting kits and procedures if sensitive to bee stings
- Develop a safety plan for your home and yard
- Organize a meeting to inform neighbors about the AHB to help increase neighborhood safety.

Bee-Proofing Your Home

- Remove possible nesting sites around home and yard
- Insect outside walls and eaves of home and outbuildings
- Seal openings larger than 1/8" in walls, around chimneys and plumbing
- Install fine screens (1/8" hardware cloth) over tops of rain spouts, vents and openings in water meter/utility boxes
- From spring to fall check once or twice a week for bees entering or leaving the same area of your home or yard.

As a general rule, stay away from all honey bee swarms and colonies. If bees are encountered, get away quickly. While running away, try to protect face and eyes as much as possible. Take shelter in a car or building. Water or thick brush does not offer enough protection. Do not stand and swat at bees; rapid motions will cause them to sting.

What To Do If Stung

- Go quickly to a safe area
- Remove stinger as soon as possible
- Don't squeeze stinger; pressure will release more venom
- Scrape stinger out with fingernail, knife blade or credit card
- Wash sting area with soap and water like any other wound
- Apply ice pack for a few minutes to relieve pain and swelling
- Seek medical attention if breathing is troubled, if stung numerous times or if allergic to bee stings.

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