

Africanized Honey Bees Meeting Kit

AFRICANIZED KILLER BEES

The Africanized bee is a hybrid species of the Western honeybee. These so-called “killer” bees were established when bees from southern Africa and local Brazilian honeybees mated. The first Africanized bees in the United States were discovered in 1985 at an oil field in California. Then, in 1990, the first permanent Africanized bee colonies arrived in Texas from Mexico. Today, Africanized honeybees are found in southern California, southern Nevada, Arizona, Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, western Louisiana, southern Arkansas, and central and southern Florida.

Africanized honeybees can chase a person a quarter of a mile (400 m); they have killed some 1,000 humans, with victims receiving 10 times more stings than from European honeybees.

HOW TO IDENTIFY AFRICANIZED BEES

Africanized “killer” bees look so much like domestic honeybees that the only way to tell the two apart is by measuring their bodies. Africanized bees are slightly smaller than their counterpart. They are golden yellow with darker bands of brown.

JOB HAZARD ANALYSIS FOR AFRICANIZED BEES

For Forest Service work, develop an areawide plan of action in the event a bee colony is discovered or bees attack. This plan should include the nearest hospital and transportation methods.

Identify the emergency responders that may be called. Determine ahead of time whether they can deal effectively with an attack.

Identify a bee professional who can be called to move or eliminate a colony.

Make sure all employees have a first-aid kit available. Persons who know they are allergic to bee stings should carry their own emergency sting kit (such as the Ana-Kit or Epi-Pen) and be familiar with its use.

A few facts to help work safely in areas where bees are found.

- Honeybee colonies of European descent defend themselves by stationing guard bees at the colony entrance. The guard bees attack and protect the colony against intruders in the immediate vicinity of the entrance.
- Recent research has shown that Africanized guard bees appear to aggressively patrol and defend territories extending 30 meters or more beyond the nest entrance. These territories expand and contract in response to frequency of disturbance. Patrolling bees maintain their territory by head butting intruders to drive them away. When butting, individual bees buzz their wings at sound frequencies above those of normal flight and fly directly at the target with their legs extended behind them. Since butting is an easily recognized characteristic of highly defensive bee colonies, anyone encountering bees that head butt should quickly retreat.
- The individual Africanized honeybee looks just like the European honeybee. A single sting from an Africanized honeybee is no different than the single sting of a European honeybee. Like the European honeybee, the Africanized honeybee loses its stinger and dies when it stings, so a single bee can sting only once.
- While a single sting may not be dangerous, the bee has marked you as a target for other bees. Africanized honeybees aggressively attack the target in large numbers until the target ceases to be a threat or leaves the area.
- Africanized honeybee colonies can be found just about anywhere: in upside-down flower pots, inside the walls of houses, in tires, latrines, hollow trees and logs, bushes, and holes in the ground.

PERSONAL PROTECTION PROTOCOL DURING AN ATTACK

Run Away! Do not stop to help others. You will bring the bees to them. Small children, the elderly, and the disabled may require assistance when they are being attacked. Once the bees associate you with their target, you will become a target too. Protect yourself before assisting those needing help.

As you are running, pull your shirt up over your head or use a coat or blanket to protect your face. Do not slow down. If you have an emergency bee hood, put it on while you are leaving. The hood will minimize the stings around the sensitive areas of your head. Bees will crawl into clothing to attack, and can sting through light clothing. You should leave the area as fast as it is safely possible.

- **Keep Running!** Do not stop running until you believe you have left the bees defensive area or you have reached protection, such as a vehicle or building. Do not jump into water, the bees will wait for you to come up for air. Africanized honeybees may chase their victim for more than a quarter mile. If you are trapped, cover up with clothes, blanket, sleeping bag, or whatever is handy.
- **Do not swat at the bees or flail your arms.** Bees are attracted to movement.
- Once you have reached shelter or have outrun the bees, remove all the stingers that are embedded in your skin. Experts now suggest grasping the stinger with your fingers or tweezers and pulling the stinger out immediately rather than scraping it out with a card.
- If you see persons being attacked, encourage them to run away and seek shelter. Do not attempt to rescue them yourself. Call 911, the local emergency number, or your dispatch to report a serious attack.
- If you have been stung more than 15 times, are feeling ill, or find it difficult to get a deep breath, seek medical attention immediately. The average person can safely

tolerate five stings per pound of body weight. While 250 stings could kill a child, an average, healthy adult could withstand as many as 550 stings. These estimates do not apply to persons who are abnormally sensitive to bee stings, less than 1 percent of the population. For these persons, a single sting may be life threatening.

- **Wear appropriate clothing.** When hiking, wear light-colored clothing, including socks. Avoid wearing leather. When defending their nests, honeybees target objects that resemble their natural predators (such as bears and skunks), so they tend to go after dark, furry objects, or leather. Bees see the color red as black. Fluorescent orange is a better choice than red for work clothing.
- **Avoid wearing scents of any kind.** Bees communicate by scent and are very sensitive to odors. Avoid strongly scented shampoo, soaps, perfumes, after-shaves, heavily scented gum.
- **Be extremely careful using any machinery that produces vibrations or loud noises,** such as chain saws, weed eaters, lawn mowers, tractors, or electric generators.

FINAL WORD

Respect the dangers of Honeybees. If you encounter or come across any colonies call a bee professional who can move or eliminate the colony.