Bees and Wasps Safety Meeting Kit

WHAT'S AT STAKE

Almost everyone has experienced some type of bee or wasp sting in their life. For most people stings from these insects do not pose a major issue. However for others, there can be a severe allergic reaction that is life threatening.

WHAT' S THE DANGER

According to NIOSH, thousands of people are stung by insects each year, and as many as 90–100 people die as a result of allergic reactions. This number may be underreported as deaths may be mistakenly diagnosed as heart attacks or sunstrokes or may be attributed to other causes. Most individuals only experience minor swelling and pain after being stung, but many individuals can experience other symptoms after a sting like: Pain, Redness, Swelling, Flushing, Hives, Itching, and Anaphylaxis.

Bees and wasps are commonly encountered, especially during late summer when they are most abundant and more active. In nature, these stinging insects play a beneficial role, particularly as predators of pest insects and as pollinators.

HONEY AND BUMBLE BEE: The Colonies

Honey bees live in perennial colonies that nest in crevices of large trees, voids of building walls, or other protected areas. Unlike honey bees, bumble bees establish new colonies each spring. They prefer to build their nest in abandoned mice burrows, small cavities in building walls, or other similar spaces.

Both the honey and bumble bee can sting and will aggressively defend their colony. While foraging, bees are rather passive and rarely sting unless severely provoked. When a honey bee stings, it

is just once. Their strongly barbed stinger lodges in the skin, then tears from the bee's body when it flies away – this causes the death of the bee. The bumble bee's stinger however lacks barbs, so it can sting repeatedly.

WASPS: The Colonies

Wasps establish a new colony each spring and almost never re-use their old nest. Both yellow jackets and paper wasps construct paper nest from chewed wood fiber mixed with saliva. A paper wasp's nest resemble an umbrella consisting of a single comb with open cells. Paper wasps commonly build nests on tree limbs, building overhangs, and beams and supports in attics of garages, barns, and sheds. They also build nests in small cavities of building walls, within metal gutters and poles, and under outdoor furniture. As for yellow jackets, certain types conceal their nests below ground in old rodent burrows, behind exterior building walls, in hollows of children's playground equipment, or other similar spaces. Other types build large, conspicuous hanging nests in shrubs, trees, or under eaves of buildings.

Like bees, wasps will sting in defense of its colony or itself. In late summer and fall, yellow jackets become aggressive scavengers, sometimes stinging without being provoked. The wasp's stinger has small barbs which do not embed in the skin. Wasps can sting repeatedly, and will often do so if threatened or protecting their nest.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF

Protect Yourself

- Do not use scented deodorant, cologne or perfume. (Fragrances attract insects.)
- Wear light-colored clothing. (Bright colors and patterns attract insects.)
- Wear long-sleeve shirts and pants.
- Tie back long hair to keep stinging insects from getting entangled.
- If you must work near bees and other stinging insects,

consider wearing a bee-keepers style hat with netting to cover your head, neck and shoulders.
- Keep food and drink covered or under screens when eating outdoors.
- Clean up and dispose food and garbage properly, including decaying fallen fruit, and dog or other animal feces.

Avoid Their Attack

- Stay calm and still if a single bee or wasp is flying around. Swatting may cause it to sting.
- If you are attacked by several stinging insects, run to get away from them. Some bees release chemicals when they sting that prompt other nearby bees to attack.
- If a stinging insect flies inside your vehicle, stop the car slowly, and open all the windows.

Control Their Nest

- Identify the insect and locate its nest. If it is necessary to control them, use the least toxic and most appropriate methods available.

OTHER PRECAUTIONS

- The best way to prevent stings is to avoid the insects. Leave the area, if possible. If there is a travelling swarm, they will likely leave within a few days.
- Note that insect repellent (“bug spray”) does not affect these stinging insects. Avoidance and awareness are the keys to not being stung.

FINAL WORD

Take the hazards that bees and wasps create seriously when working outdoors. Even if you are not allergic to them someone close by may be. Do a site check before entering an area to perform work. Avoiding areas where these insects are is your best option to prevent stings. When avoiding them completely is not an option and there is a nest in the area try to not disturb them.