



Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services
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PUBLIC ADVISORY

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It has become clear that the Africanized honey bee (AHB) population has grown and will continue to grow in Florida due to its numerous pathways into the state and the lack of effective eradication products or techniques. The Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services, in cooperation with other agricultural stakeholders, is developing the tools to protect the beekeeping industry and educate the public on how to learn to live with this potentially dangerous insect. At some point, the aggressive behavior of these bees will become more common. Interaction between AHBs and people and animals will likely happen.

For the last decade, Florida has been surveying for the AHB and established the country's first AHB detection program that is jointly operated by the Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services and the U. S. Department of Agriculture. The program involves placing bait hives in ports, and educating ships' crews and dockworkers to identify and report suspicious swarms. Today, nearly 500 bait hives are in place throughout the state, primarily in port areas, along Interstate-10 and on the Florida/Alabama border. The bait hives are checked on a three-week cycle based on the reproduction habits of the AHB.

Pathways for introduction of the AHB into Florida are numerous. AHB swarms have been intercepted 30 times in the past 22 years in Florida. The majority have come off ships from Guatemala. Since 2002, when the first AHBs were detected in the Tampa Bay area, 653 samples have been taken with 59 positive for AHB genetics.

Over the last several years, numerous attacks on humans and animals have been reported in California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas. Emergency response agencies in these states have implemented first responder training programs as well as public education efforts. While there have been no attacks on humans reported in Florida, a horse in La Belle was attacked in May of this year.

As a state agency, your office may become actively involved in emergency situations. This letter provides some background information on the AHB situation. And to help you prepare for potential encounters with AHBs, we encourage you to follow the safety precautions listed below and to educate your staff as well.

AHB safety precautions:

- T Be attuned and alert to buzzing in your environment – this may indicate a nest or swarm of bees.
- T Use care when entering sheds or outbuildings where bees may nest.
- T Examine work areas **before** using power equipment such as lawn mowers, weed cutters, and chain saws – the noise excites bees.
- T Be alert when engaged in all outdoor activities.



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- T Teach respect and caution of all bees.
- T Visit with a doctor about bee sting kits and procedures if sensitive to bee stings.
- T **Do not disturb** a nest or swarm of bees, leave the area immediately, and contact a pest control company or your county extension agent.
- T If attacked by aggressive bees, run as fast as possible to a safe area. Aggressive AHBs may pursue for up to ¼ of a mile.

If stung:

- T Go quickly to a safe area.
- T Remove stingers by scraping – use a flicking action with a finger nail or credit card. Do not squeeze or the stinger may stay in and get infected
- T Apply ice.
- T **Seek medical attention immediately if breathing becomes labored.**

If you anticipate your personnel might be exposed to AHBs or asked to assist First Responders, a risk assessment should be performed. Properly fitting protective equipment is a necessity. Full length “bee suits,” protective veils, hats and gloves with sleeve length extensions are available from most beekeeping supply distributors. Without the correct protective equipment and training, the potential rescuer may become an additional victim.

The Department is partnering with the University of Florida/Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences on AHB response and control training initiatives and anticipates having a coordinated plan in a few months. During this developmental phase, please be aware, be alert and be cautious.

If you have any questions, need further clarification, or if we can assist you otherwise, contact Jerry Hayes 352/372-3505 x128 hayesg@doacs.state.fl.us or Denise Feiber, APR, 352-372-3505 x102 feiberd@doacs.state.fl.us

