



Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services
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Okeechobee County Man Stung by Bees Dies

GAINESVILLE—The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services' Division of Plant Industry (DPI) in cooperation with the University of Florida's Institute of Food & Agricultural Sciences (UF/IFAS) announced today that a resident of Okeechobee County died as a result of being stung over a hundred times by bees that initial lab results indicate are Africanized honey bees (AHB). The victim's name had not been released at the time of this announcement. Though numerous domestic animals and livestock have been killed by AHB in Florida, if further testing confirms these were AHB, this would be the first human fatality. In other states where AHB are established, there have been over 17 human fatalities since 1990.

The stinging incident happened on April 9 in a rural area in the northwest section of the county. Though details of the incident have not been confirmed, it was reported that the victim was attempting to dismantle a trailer where a nest of bees had been observed by him approximately one week before. County rescue workers transported the victim to an area hospital where he died after being on life support for an extended period. Medical staff indicated that the victim had a fatal allergic reaction to the bee stings.

On April 10, a DPI apiary inspector went to the site of the attack with county fire and rescue personnel to collect samples for laboratory analysis to determine if the bees were Africanized honey bees. The colony has been destroyed. The samples are being analyzed at DPI's Gainesville laboratory and preliminary testing methods indicate a high probability that the bees are Africanized. Full morphometric testing, which measures body size, wing and leg length, and other identifying characteristics, is expected to be completed later today.

A training session for first responders and outdoor workers will be held Tuesday, April 15 at the Okeechobee Extension Office on Highway 98. A public information session will also be held from 5:00 to 6:30 that evening. For more information contact: Daniel Culbert, UF/IFAS, 863-763-6469.

The Florida Department of Agriculture & Consumer Services monitors over 500 AHB bait traps throughout the state. AHB are the defensive cousins of European honey bees which, through Florida's vital honey bee industry, provide pollination that result in the production of approximately one third of the food we eat and three fourths of Florida's agricultural crops. Public and farm worker safety are major priorities for the beekeeping industry.

Since their initial discovery in Florida in 2002, AHB have been positively identified in all Florida counties south of Marion County, with the majority of stinging incidents in South Florida. Reports of possible Africanized honey bee nest sightings or stinging incidents are received regularly by the Department.

An AHB inter-agency communications group comprised of over 15 Florida agencies and apiary industry representatives was formed in 2006 to help get the word out about things the public can do to prevent attacks. The motto of the group, **Bee Aware...look, listen and run**, was chosen because if people will regularly monitor their surroundings and run inside a protective structure, when threatened, they can avoid potentially dangerous, painful attacks from Africanized honey bees.

The Department has been working with the University of Florida's Institute of Food & Agriculture Sciences (UF/IFAS) on presentations to over 150 statewide organizations; exhibited information at conferences, festivals, and fairs; distributed thousands of information packets; and provided interviews to news media and interested parties on AHB – a grassroots public education effort that has resulted in reaching an estimated 4.5 million people. The Department and UF/IFAS plan to continue to work to reach as many people as possible in all 67 Florida counties to deliver important messages about AHB and Florida's important beekeeping industry.

The Department's helpline and county extension offices receive frequent calls from people who know about the dangers of AHB, but are confused about what they are supposed to do if they see a nest of bees. People should stay away from insect nests and call a licensed pest control company to remove the nests. They should never try to remove a nest themselves. A list of licensed pest control operators by county is available at www.doacs.state.fl.us/pi/plantinsp/ahb.html . To prevent stinging incidents, the public is urged to follow these important guidelines:

- If allergic to bees, always have a bee sting kit available. These require a prescription from your physician.
- Eliminate potential AHB nesting sites. Check walls and eaves of structures. Plug or screen holes.
- Stay alert for bees. Look for bees in work areas before using power equipment such as weed eaters, lawnmowers and chainsaws – noise excites AHB.
- If bees chase you, run away and get inside a car or building.
- Hire a licensed pest control professional with experience and training in honey bee removal to remove the bees and the comb. DO NOT attempt to remove it yourself.
- Never use “wasp and hornet spray” on honey bees. Honey bees are not on the label of most of these products. They do kill honey bees, but they also cause the release of alarm pheromone that stimulates the rest of the colony to attack.
- Seek medical attention if needed.

It is important to remember that managed honey bee colonies are critical to Florida agriculture and these more gentle honey bees should not be confused with the highly defensive Africanized honey bee. Floridians are used to living among dangerous animals and insects – education is the key to staying safe. Honey bees need to be respected for their ability to defend their colony. They do not need to be feared if you see them on flowers in your garden.

For more information, contact: DPI's helpline at 888-397-1517, your county extension office

<http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/map/index.html> or visit www.doacs.state.fl.us/pi or <http://afbee.ifas.ufl.edu/about.html>

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