



County of San Diego
Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measures

Africanized Honey Bee in San Diego County

Africanized honey bees (AHB) are a more temperamental relative of the common garden honey bee, known as the European honey bee. (AHB) were first introduced into Brazil in 1956, and have been steadily moving northward since then. They are currently found in the United States in parts of Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California. Africanized honey bees are known to defend their colonies more intensively and with less provocation than other bees, and so it is important to know how to avoid being stung.

Are Africanized Honey Bees in San Diego County?

Africanized honey bees (AHB) are here! The entire County, from the desert to the coast, is considered colonized by AHB. This means that you might encounter aggressive honey bees anywhere in the County.

Bees are most active in the spring and fall, so be especially careful during those times. With a few simple precautions, you can protect yourself and others.

If you are attacked by Bees call 911

How to Protect Yourself

Stay away from honey bee colonies.

- Africanized honey bees sting to defend themselves or their nest.
- If you can avoid disturbing them in any way, they usually will not sting.
- To avoid approaching a nest by accident, listen for the steady buzz produced by a colony and look for flying insects.
- Look for bees to nest in cavities such as holes in the ground, crevices in rocks, hollow trees, discarded tires, saguaro cactus cavities, or water meter boxes.
- Homeowners commonly encounter colonies when doing yard work.
- Do not climb a tree, kick over a log or roll over a rock without checking first for bees.
- If you do see a colony, do not stand in front of the entrance or in the flight path.
- Treat honey bee colonies as you would any other venomous creature, such as a snake or a scorpion.
- Be alert and stay away!

Wear appropriate clothing.

- When hiking or hunting in the wilderness, wear light-colored clothing.
- The animals most likely to attack a bee colony are skunks and bears, so honeybees respond most violently to anything that is dark-colored or fuzzy.
- Wear white socks, because honey bees are known to sting the ankles of persons wearing dark socks.

- Always wear full-length pants when hiking and long-sleeved shirts if possible.
- Avoid wearing shiny jewelry and leather, which attract bees.

Avoid wearing perfumes or scents.

- Bees are sensitive to odors such as perfumes, soaps, after-shave lotions, and hair spray. These odors may either attract or provoke bees. Even sunscreens may have odors that increase your chances of an attack.

Avoid excessive motion when near a colony.

- Bees are able to detect movement, and are much more likely to respond to an object in motion than one that is stationary.
- Avoid flailing your arms or swatting at bees.
- Do not panic if you spot a bees' nest, just move away slowly and deliberately.
- Avoid operating any machinery (mowers, line-trimmers or chain saws) near nests.
- If you are attacked by several bees, then the best strategy is to run to shelter as quickly as possible.

Pet safety

- When hiking, it is best to keep your dog on a leash or under close control.
- A large animal bounding through the brush is likely to disturb a colony and be attacked.
- When the animal returns to its master, it will bring the attacking bees with it.
- Animals receive numerous stings because they cannot escape the bees.
- Be careful not to tie or pen animals near honey bee hives. Even the mild-mannered European honey bee has been known to attack animals tied near their hives.
- If your animals or pets are being stung, try to release them without endangering yourself.

Minimize stings once a colony of Africanized honey bees begins to attack:

Run away quickly, using a direct route to shelter, or until the bees stop following (up to 1/2 mile).

Bees tend to target the sensitive areas around the eyes and head. Cover your head as much as possible by pulling your collar up over your ears or your shirt over your head and face while you run.

Get inside a house, car, or other closed building. Do not worry about bringing a few bees in with you, just get indoors. If you are trapped for some reason, cover up with blankets, sleeping bags, clothes, etc.