



African Honey Bee Safety

Part I: Prevention

- **Bee-proof buildings.** Especially in the spring and fall, keep an eye out for African honey bee (AHB) swarms on the hunt for clean, dry, preferably enclosed spaces to nest. Any gap larger than 1/8 inch that leads into such a space is fair game – so seal up those gaps when you see them. See Resources for guidance on how to “bee-proof” buildings.
- **Remove nests early.** If a swarm does make its home in one of your buildings, remove the nest as early as possible. Nests are far easier to remove *before* brood and honey stores accumulate. Unless you have proper training and protective equipment, do not attempt to remove the nest yourself. See Resources for a county-by-county list of licensed pest control operators in California.
- **Avoid dark-colored clothing and equipment.** Honey bees target dark-colored items when defending their nests. Some biologists think that this is an evolved response to dark-colored predators, such as honey badgers. When in AHB territory, choose light-colored clothing and gear.
- **Carry a handkerchief or bee veil.** These items are lightweight, fit in your pocket, and can protect your face during an AHB encounter. See Resources for a retailer of inexpensive bee veils. Bee suits can be hot and unwieldy, but wearing one is wise if you are working within 60 feet of AHB nests or at a site where other people have been attacked.
- **Carry an EpiPen and know how to use it.** EpiPens are lightweight epinephrine injectors prescribed for use in emergency treatment of allergic reactions. Don’t wait until you are stung to read the instructions – learn in advance to use the EpiPen.

Part II: Encounters

- **Be alert.** When in AHB country, be alert to the hum of an active bee colony; to the sight of many bees entering and leaving the same hole or crack; and to other warning signs that you are nearing a nest, such as a honey bee repeatedly flying at your face. However, do not be alarmed by a large number of honey bees on flowers – they are gathering pollen and nectar and are not likely to bother you.
- **Walk away from swarms.** If you see a swarm clinging to a branch or other object, don’t panic. A swarm is a group of workers and a queen. They have no brood or honey stores to defend and are not as aggressive as an established colony. If you encounter a swarm, calmly walk away. Within a few hours, it should leave the area.

- **If attacked, protect your face and RUN to shelter.** AHB are known to pursue people over ¼ mile. Stings to your face are more debilitating than stings to other body parts and may prevent a hasty retreat. So, put on your handkerchief or bee veil (or, as a last resort, pull your shirt up over your face) and run to shelter. Do not jump into water – the bees will still be present when you come up for air.
- **If stung more than 15 times or if allergic, use an EpiPen and go to the hospital immediately.**
- **If approaching someone being stung, wear full-body protection.**
- **Remove stings quickly, but away from the colony.** A stinging bee leaves behind the entire tip of its abdomen, including a barbed sting, a venom sac, and nerves/musculature that continue to drive the sting into your skin while pumping in venom. Pinch or scrape the sting out as soon as possible, but do so away from the colony. An alarm pheromone released from the sting's base alerts other bees to your location and increases the likelihood they will sting.

Part III: Resources

- **acwm.co.la.ca.us/scripts/proofing.htm**
Los Angeles County ACWM site on how to bee-proof buildings
- **pcoc.org/consumer/ahb/operators.cfm**
County-by-county list of licensed pest control operators in California
- **epipen.com**
EpiPen site
- **stingshield.com**
Purveyor of inexpensive bee veils; also a great source of general AHB information
- **invasivespeciesinfo.gov/animals/afrhonbee.shtml**
Comprehensive USDA National Invasive Species Information Center AHB site
- **bees.ucr.edu**
Excellent source of AHB information compiled by researchers at UC-Riverside
- **<http://www.ento.okstate.edu/ahb/>**
Useful summary site with general AHB information
- **<http://www.cdffa.ca.gov/phpps/pe/bees.htm>**
CDFA Pest Exclusion Branch's site with bee and beehive regulations