

The FAQ's of Beekeeping in San Diego County



1. What do I do if I hear or see bees?

When you hear or see bees nearby, use caution and stay calm. If you see bees foraging on flowers, the bees are not defensive and will not bother you if you keep your distance from them. They are collecting pollen and nectar to take home for food. If you are the first to notice bees while with others, notify the group and keep them away. Stay alert to where the bees are in proximity to you or a group of people. If you are allergic to bee venom, consider bringing a companion with you when going outdoors where bees might be congregating.

If you see bees building a hive, stay as far away as possible. Bees that are protecting a hive will be more likely to exhibit defensive behavior and can become agitated.

If you see bees in boxes, those are managed apiaries being cared for by a beekeeper. If bees are bumping into you, this is their way of telling you that you are too close to their home. Move a safe distance away until they are no longer bumping you. The best way to be safe is to avoid surprising bee swarms or hives.

2. What do I do if I see a swarm of bees?

If you see a swarm of bees, which can be clumped into a ball the size of a softball up to a basketball or flying by as a unit, it is always best to keep your distance, but the bees are not generally defensive.

This is because the swarm is in search of a new home, and not protecting brood and honey supplies. If the swarm is approaching you, seek shelter indoors if possible. If there is no shelter nearby, move away if possible and cover your face and neck for protection.

If you see bees flying overhead in a large group, that is a swarm and they are trying to find a new home. The swarms land and form a cluster, and may land on a sidewalk, a car, the side of a house, or a tree. Swarms are only temporary and hang around usually just a couple of days. They are generally not a threat if left alone. Notify others of the swarms location and to leave it alone, if possible, rope off area or place a warning sign.

3. What do I do if being stung by several bees?

Here are some basic safety measures to take if a sting were to occur.

- First, know where the nearest emergency facilities are located in case of an emergency.
- Only one or two people per thousand have a hyper-allergic reaction to bees, but if you do not know if you are allergic or not, be prepared.
- Symptoms of anaphylaxis appear immediately. They include: itching, swollen eyes, wheezing, swelling of the tongue, dizziness, shock, or cardiac arrest. If you see any signs of reaction, or are not sure, call 911 immediately.
- An average person can safely tolerate 10 stings per pound of body weight, meaning an average adult could withstand over 1000 stings, and a child over 500 stings.

If you are stung, remain calm! Do not flail around or swat at any bees. Scrape the stinger out as quickly as possible, and wash or smoke the stung area to mask the alarm pheromone smell. Although a bee can only sting once and then dies, once you are stung, the pheromone left behind will incite other bees to sting you as well.

4. How do I get bees on my property removed (e.g. water meter box, mailbox, attic, yard, etc.)?

It is the responsibility of the property owner to remove a swarm or nest of bees on private property. The property owner should call a licensed pest control company or experienced beekeeper to have the bees

If you are renting, contact your landlord or property management company to notify them of the bee nest or

If the bees are in your water meter, call your local water authority.

5. How do I get my neighbor to remove bees on their property?

Let your neighbor know that bees are bothering you and you would like the property owner to remove them because it is a safety and pest hazard.

- Bees may cause structural damage to property if not removed or if removed after bees already have an established colony.
- The hive site may attract other pests like mice, rats, ants, moths and cockroaches.
- The property owner is liable for any harm bees may do to others. If your neighbor is reluctant to take action, consider offering your assistance in making arrangements for professional bee removal.
- You might be able to help by collecting cost estimates for the bee removal work or assist them with the financial obligation if that is an impediment.

6. Are bee removal service providers required to have a pest control operator's license?

If bee removal services use pesticides they are required to be properly licensed. Check here (<http://www.pestboard.ca.gov/licenses.html>) to verify the business and/or individual has a current pest control operator license.

<http://ucanr.edu/sites/sandiegobees/>

Bee Hotline 1-800-200-BEES

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7. Is it illegal to kill bees?

It's illegal to use pesticides not in accordance with label directions, and/or to apply pesticides without a current pest control operator license. Only licensed pest control businesses can legally apply pesticides for bee removal.

It is not illegal to kill bees by suffocation, solarization, or simply sealing the hive entry with a piece of steel wool.

It is unsafe to have honey bee hives in proximity to human activity unless they are managed European honey bees maintained by a beekeeper in boxes. Wild Africanized honey bee colonies in and around locations with human activity should be eliminated by an experienced professional.

Removing occasional wild honey bee colonies to protect human safety will not negatively impact the overall bee population in the area.

8. Who do I call if I want bees on my property removed but not hurt or killed?

There are some pest control companies who will perform live bee removal, and there are also local beekeepers who are interested in removing swarms while alive; however, contacting this service, consider that most feral bees within San Diego County are Africanized.

The swarms and nests of the wild or uncultivated bees around San Diego are mainly Africanized bees, or so-called "killer bees." Africanized bees overtook Southern California more than a decade ago. These bees react defensively to common disturbances, especially to vibrations such as lawn equipment. They are more defensive, attack more readily in greater numbers, and chase their target for longer distances. These are not bees that should be kept by beekeepers and are best eliminated to protect public safety.

9. What is at risk if pesticides are used near bee hives?

Any and all pesticides should be applied in accordance with the label instructions. All safety precautions should be taken while using any pesticide product.

10. Is there a time of day/season/year that is better for pesticide application to protect bees?

There are regulations regarding time of day pesticide applications can occur to reduce the risk of exposure to bees. Refer to this site (<http://www.cdpr.ca.gov/docs/legbills/calcode/030203.htm>) for more information.

11. What do I do if I suspect my bees died from pesticide poisoning?

If you suspect your bees have died from pesticide poisoning, call the County of San Diego Department of Agriculture, Weights & Measures Pesticide Regulation Program at (858) 694-8980.

When calling, be as detailed as you can in your description of the incident, if you know of any pesticides that were recently used in your area, and what symptoms your bees are experiencing.

12. Should I be alarmed if I'm finding dead bees on my property?

You should not be alarmed if you find a few dead bees on your property. Bees only live a short while (3-6 weeks depending on the time of year) and die off rates can vary by region. 100 bees or less per day is considered a normal rate.

If you regularly see dead bees on your property, this frequently indicates there is a hive nearby and you are seeing results of their natural life-span.

13. How do I determine if my hive has been attacked by insects or disease?

Beehives can be susceptible to many different pests, and each different pest comes with a variety of symptoms.

- Learning to recognize these symptoms or evidence of infestation will become easier as you gain training and experience.
- There are many resources on the Internet, including a section of this website to reference for specific information and symptoms of bee pests and diseases.
- For additional help, an apiary inspector at the County of San Diego Department of Agriculture, Weights and Measures is available to answer questions concerning hive health including pests and diseases at 1-(800)200-BEES (2337).

14. How much water do bees need?

Bees need water to regulate their hive temperature, brood nutrition, and honey production.

On an extremely hot day bees can forage up to on gallon of water per day to use in their hive. It is very important for a water source to be available in close proximity and easily accessible to a beehive at all times. If adequate water supplies are not available within the immediate vicinity, bees may invade a neighbor's backyard to find moisture from a garden fountain or they may be attracted to the chlorine in a swimming pool.

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