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## Agency News

### Caution: stinging insects more active, aggressive during hot weather

Texas is home to many stinging and biting insects and these insects are most abundant and active during the warm months of summer. Insect stings can result in anything from mild discomfort to a fatal reaction, so it's important to learn the risks associated with insect attack, how to prevent and protect yourself from stings and bites, and what to do when they occur.

#### Recognizing hazardous insects

In Texas, most serious sting attacks are caused by five types of insects: yellow jackets, honeybees, paper wasps, hornets and fire ants. Avoid contact with these insects whenever possible.

*Yellow jackets* are black with yellow markings and live in nests made out of a paper-like material. These nests are usually located underground, but can also be found in the walls of frame buildings, cracks in masonry or woodpiles.

*Honeybees* have a round, "fuzzy" body with dark brown coloring and yellow markings.

They are nonaggressive and sting only when provoked. In contrast, Africanized honeybees, a hybrid of African and European bees, are extremely aggressive and often attack



with little or no provocation. Africanized bees are present in Texas and typically build nests in building cavities, tree trunks, old tires or other protected locations.

*Paper wasps* have slender, elongated bodies and are typically black, brown or red with yellow markings. Wasp nests are made of paper-like material comprising a comb of cells that opens downward. They are often found hanging under eaves, behind shutters, and in shrubs or woodpiles.

*Hornets* are black or brown with white, orange or yellow markings similar to yellow jackets, but are much larger. Their nests are gray or brown, football-shaped, and are usually found high above ground on tree branches, in shrubs, on buildings or in tree hollows.

*Fire ants* are reddish-brown to black insects that nest in mounds of dirt on the ground. Fire ant nests can grow to be quite large, up to 18 inches tall in certain soils. Fire ants attack with little warning and in great numbers. Their sting causes an immediate burning sensation.

#### Preventing insect attacks

Avoid wearing perfume, cologne and brightly-colored clothing. Don't wear loose-fitting garments or open-toed shoes when working outdoors, as they can easily trap a stinging insect against your skin. The smell of food attracts insects, so keep your food covered when cooking, eating, or drinking outside.

Insects are most likely to sting when their homes are disturbed, and this often occurs

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due to the sound and vibration of power equipment. Always avoid insects and their nests when using mowers, tractors, weed-trimmers, chainsaws or other motorized tools.

If you find insect nests in or near your workplace, have them removed or destroyed as soon as possible. Honeybees are very important to the environment, so it's best to have them moved rather than destroyed. Keep in mind that moving or eradicating a nest of stinging insects can be hazardous. Correctional units needing assistance with a bee or wasp situation should contact their safety officer. Texas Department of Criminal Justice offices should contact the Agribusiness, Land and Minerals Department at 936-437-5400 for help.

### ***Emergency care for sting victims***

When an insect sting occurs:

1. Get away from the area to avoid further stings. Try to remain calm and quiet and do not make sudden moves or swat at the insects, as this will only agitate them and cause them to continue their attack.

2. If the stinger remains in the skin, scrape it off with a straight-edged object such as a credit card or back of a knife. Don't try to pull the stinger out with fingers or tweezers; this will usually force more venom into the sting site.

3. Carefully wash the area with soap and water. Repeat this two to three times a day until healed.

4. Swab the site with disinfectant such as rubbing alcohol.

5. To reduce pain and swelling, apply ice or a cold pack.

6. Apply hydrocortisone cream, calamine lotion or a baking soda paste to the sting until healed.

Most sting reactions are mild, resulting in little more than an annoying itch or stinging sensation and swelling that lasts a day or two. Delayed reactions may cause symptoms such as fever, joint pain, hives or swollen glands.

Moderate allergic reactions include mild nausea and stomach cramps, diarrhea or

swelling larger than two inches in diameter at the site. Sting victims with these symptoms should seek medical help. Any insect sting to the mucous membranes of the mouth, nose or throat should receive immediate medical attention, as swelling may block the victim's airway.

Severe reactions to insect stings may occur suddenly and progress rapidly. Call for emergency medical assistance immediately if the victim has difficulty breathing; hives, swelling of the mouth, lips or throat; fainting spells or confusion; rapid heartbeat, nausea, stomach cramps or vomiting. For people who are allergic to insect venom, a simple sting may be a life-threatening event. Anyone who knows they are allergic should consider wearing a special bracelet or necklace that identifies their condition should they be unable to communicate.

For more safety information about stinging insect hazards, contact the TDCJ Administrative Review and Risk Management Division at 936-437-4839. ●