



State of Wisconsin  
Governor Tony Evers

**Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection**  
Secretary Randy Romanski

## **Spilled Bees Response Plan**

### **Migratory Beekeeping in Wisconsin**

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service and the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection's Apiary Program, approximately 50,000-60,000 honey bee colonies enter Wisconsin for honey production or pollination services each year. Additionally, approximately 34,000 honey bee colonies leave the state each fall. Beekeepers move these colonies within the state and across state lines on semi-trucks often carrying 400 or more hives per trailer, with each honey bee colony housing 50,000-70,000 honey bees, depending on the time of year.

### **Initial Response to a Bee-related Accident**

With millions of bees moving on our Wisconsin roadways each year, there is potential for a bee-related accident or semi-truck breakdown to occur. In the event of a honey bee-related accident, it is best for people to maintain a safe distance from the bees until beekeepers or proper beekeeping personal protective equipment (PPE) can arrive. In the event that first responders need to access the scene to assist with injured drivers or passengers, they should assess damage, possibly shut down the road, and proceed with the following safety measures in mind:

- Bees are attracted to light. However, they cannot perceive the color red. If the accident occurs at night, red headlamps should be used in place of flashlights or vehicle headlights to avoid attracting bees to yourself or others. Once emergency personnel are equipped with the proper PPE, regular (non-red) lights should be safe to use.
- Honey bee stingers can penetrate through clothing. Bee suits offer the best protection; however, layering clothing can help create a barrier as well. Secure clothing or bee suits by taping around your ankles, wrists, or other openings to prevent bees from crawling inside clothing or PPE. In the unlikely event that a bee does crawl inside your clothing, pinch the bee between the fabric, avoiding squishing the bee into your skin as this will encourage them to sting. Walk away from the bees if you need to remove a bee from your clothing, if a stinger needs to be removed, or if you're feeling overwhelmed.  
*\*Stingers should be removed with a credit card or fingernail. Never squeeze and pull the venom sac as this leads to the full dose of venom being administered.*
- If defensive bees are near you, be aware of your surroundings and avoid walking towards people who are not in PPE.

### **In the Event of a Vehicle Rollover or Accident:**

The severity of the accident and location will dictate the course of action. Officials should determine the best course of action – destruction of bees and clean-up versus saving the bees and manually picking up the hives and reloading them onto another truck. *In either situation, please be aware that not all bees will be removed from the scene and some bee activity may continue at the incident site for up to a day or two after. These bees should not be defensive, but care should be taken to prevent any potential stings.*

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Honey bee flight activity can be minimized by instructing the fire department to spray a gentle mist of water over the wreck.

*For destruction of bees:*

- Honey bees are easily killed with aqueous film forming foam (AFFF)
- Firefighter turnout gear or a hazmat suit offer adequate protection from bees for rescue workers, should they need to tend to a trapped or injured victim. Wrap the injured person(s) in a blanket or tarp to protect them from stings.

*If saving the bees:*

- If the load is still secured on the trailer with ratchet straps, the truck can usually be righted without spilling the hives. Instruct the fire department to mist the load with water and request to locate large wreckers and air bladders to right the load.
  - o It is best to wait for the air bladders to arrive, as just using wreckers can result in the hives breaking apart, the net over the load ripping, and the release of agitated bees.
  - o Risk of the bees overheating should be considered. Gently misting the secured load of bees periodically may help reduce this risk.
- If the load is not secured on the trailer, instruct the fire department to mist the load with water and request to locate forklifts to assist in moving hives back onto the trailer.
  - o It is best to wait for the forklifts to arrive before moving the bees since the pallets will be heavy. A forklift will help move the bees back onto the truck most efficiently once hives are reassembled.

**Emergency Contacts**

The following list of emergency contacts should be considered for sharing expertise and/or assistance in finding beekeepers in the area.

Wisconsin State Apiarist: Brooke Nikkila-Sommerfeldt  
[brooke.sommerfeldt@wisconsin.gov](mailto:brooke.sommerfeldt@wisconsin.gov), (608) 807-6589

Western Wisconsin Apiary Inspector: Patrick Sizemore  
[patrick.sizemore@wisconsin.gov](mailto:patrick.sizemore@wisconsin.gov), (715) 492-0814

Eastern Wisconsin Apiary Inspector: Vacant

Wisconsin Honey Producers Association president: Tracy Malterer  
[tracymalterer@gmail.com](mailto:tracymalterer@gmail.com), (920) 285-1817

*Thank you to Michigan State University (MSU) and Maine Department of Agriculture for allowing us to adapt their protocols.*

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