

**TENNESSEE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
REGULATORY SERVICES DIVISION
APIARY SECTION**

VOLUNTARY HONEY BEE BEST MANAGEMENT PRACTICES POLICY

Justification:

The Voluntary Honey Bee Best Management Practices (BMP) Policy has been developed by the Tennessee Department of Agriculture's Apiary Technical Advisory Committee at the request of the Tennessee Municipal League and the Tennessee beekeepers to provide guidelines for beekeepers maintaining honey bees in urban areas. When followed these BMP's help ensure that beekeepers are keeping their managed colonies of European Honey bees in a safe and responsible manner. European Honey bees are generally gentle in nature. Honey bees are an important component of both rural and urban ecosystems. They are an important pollinator for native and cultivated plants. Honey bees play a crucial role in the production of food for humans, livestock and wildlife. Managed colonies can be safely kept in all areas of the State. Currently, there are managed colonies of European Honey bees in the downtown areas of all major Tennessee cities that are being kept without any stinging incidents or other problems. When properly managed, most neighbors do not even realize they are there. Tennessee beekeepers provide an important service to the public by providing pollinators, honey, capturing feral swarms and removing feral colonies of honey bees from structures in both rural and urban areas of the State.

Managed colonies of European Honey bees and beekeepers in Tennessee are an important part of monitoring for the arrival of Africanized Honey bees in the State of Tennessee. When beekeepers discover an aggressive colony, they will notify the State Apiarist. At that time the State Apiarist responds to check the colony, take samples, have the sample analyzed and determine if immediate action is required for public safety. According to research conducted in the State of Florida, European Honey bees will naturally colonize an area with up to two large gentle colonies per acre where Africanized Honey bees can colonize an area with up to 200 small aggressive colonies per acre. Having managed European Honey bee colonies in an urban area will help keep Africanized Honey bee numbers at a minimum due to competition for nectar and pollen resources.

A scanned electronic copy of the beekeeper's signed and dated Voluntary Honey Bee Best Management Practices Agreement will be kept on file at Tennessee Department of Agriculture headquarters.

Definitions:

As used in this part, unless the context otherwise requires:

- (1) "Africanized Honey Bee (AHB)" means hybrids of the African Honey Bee *Apis mellifera scutellata* with various European honey bees and far more aggressive than the European subspecies.

- (2) "Apiary" means a collection of one (1) or more colonies of bees in beehives at a location. A building or room in a building is considered to be the location of an apiary only if one (1) or more beehives containing colonies of honey bees are housed within that building;
- (3) "Bee disease or pest" means a condition in which a colony is infested/infected with a bacterial, fungal, viral, or parasitic condition or an organism that can or will affect the well-being of a colony;
- (4) "Beekeeper" means any individual, association, corporation, or other entity who deliberately provides nesting sites for colonies of honey bees and attempts to establish and maintain such colonies at any location;
- (5) "Bee sting" means an injury sustained and inflicted by a worker honey bee;
- (6) "Caution sign" means a standardized sign with black print on yellow background for posting on or near an apiary as a precaution that honey bees are in the area;
- (7) "Colony" means all of the bees living together as one (1) social unit and may include the bee equipment in which the bees are living;
- (8) "Commissioner" means the commissioner of agriculture or such commissioner's designated agent;
- (9) "Department" means the Tennessee Department of Agriculture;
- (10) "Flight path" means the distinct route taken by many bees leaving from or returning to their hive;
- (11) "Hive" or "beehive" means that container or structure used by a beekeeper to provide a cavity in which a colony of bees is expected to establish a permanent nest;
- (12) "Honey extraction" means the removal of honey from combs;
- (13) "Honeycomb" means removable frames, containing wax cells which house honey, pollen, and/or brood (eggs, larvae, pupae);
- (14) "Inhabited dwelling" means a building in which humans reside;
- (15) The nucleus box, also called a nuc, is a smaller version of a normal beehive, designed to hold fewer frames. The nuc box is smaller because it is intended to contain a smaller number of honey bees, and a smaller space makes it easier for the bees to control the temperature and humidity of the colony, which is vital for brood rearing;
- (16) "Overly Aggressive Honey Bee Colony" Means a colony of honey bees that has been classified by the Tennessee Department of Agriculture to exhibit a level of aggression in response to stimuli that makes the colony a public health hazard. A colony will be

considered overly aggressive using the “kick test” adopted by the State of Florida for this purpose. The “kick test” consists of: (1) observing the activity of the colony in question for five minutes without disturbing it, (2) forcibly tapping the colony on the side near the hive entrance three times and observing the reaction, (3) if the colony reacts with the majority of the bees in the colony coming out to defend the colony with a stinging response, then the colony will be considered overly aggressive;

- (17) "Pollination" means the transfer of pollen by honey bees from anthers to stigmas of flowers for the purpose of plant fertilization;
- (18) "Queen" means an adult, mated female that lives in a honey bee colony or hive;
- (19) “Queen Mating nucs” means queen mating nucs are a special type of nuc that may be even smaller than nucs that use standard size frames. These tiny nucs are sometimes called mini-mating nucs. Mating nucs are used in a queen mating yard;
- (20) "Registered apiary" means an apiary location that has been properly registered with the department as required;
- (21) "Registered beekeeper" means a beekeeper whose apiaries are properly registered with the department;
- (22) "Robbing" means bees attempting to access honey stored or spilled in another hive;
- (23) "State apiarist" means that person employed by the department who has the qualifications prescribed by this part and has been designated as state apiarist by the commissioner;
- (24) "Swarm" means cluster or flying mass of Honey Bees including workers, queen, and drones;
- (25) "Undeveloped property" means any idle land that has no structures or facilities intended for human occupancy. Property used exclusively for streets, highways, or commercial agriculture is to be considered undeveloped property for the purpose of the Tennessee Honey Bee Best Management Practices (HBBMP); and
- (26) "Water Supply" means any available source bees could use for water such as, but not limited to, water taps, hoses, pools, hot tubs, streams, ponds, puddles, etc.

Voluntary Honey Bee Best Management Practices:

- (1) A beekeeper will be considered to be following Voluntary Honey Bee Best management practices if he/she does the following:
 - (a) The beekeeper voluntarily agrees to conform to the Honey Bee Best Management Practices contained in these policies as outlined below:

- (i) Tennessee Beekeepers shall post a honey bee caution sign in or near the apiary clearly indentifying the apiary with their unique Tennessee Apiary Registration number. The sign shall be readable from a distance of fifty feet.
- (ii) Tennessee Beekeepers will limit the number of hives in relation to property lot size in accordance with the following:
 - (A) Less than 0.5 acre - 4 colonies (0.5 acre = 21,780 sq. ft. roughly 100 ft. x 218 ft.).
 - (B) More than 0.5 acre, less than 1 acre - 6 colonies (1 acre = 43,560 sq. ft., roughly 150 ft. x 290 ft.).
 - (C) More than 1 acre, less than 5 acres - 8 colonies (1 acre = 43,560 sq. ft., roughly 150 ft. x 290 ft.).
 - (D) Greater than 5 acres- No Limit on the number of hives (1 acre = 43,560 sq. ft., roughly 150 ft. x 290 ft.).
 - (E) Regardless of lot size: If all hives are situated at least 200 feet in any direction from all inhabited dwellings on adjoining properties of the lot on which the apiary is situated or as long as all adjoining property that falls within a 200-foot radius of any hive is undeveloped property, there will be no limit on the number of hives.
 - (F) Regardless of lot size: There will be no limitation to the number of queen mating nucs.
 - (G) Regardless of lot size: if all hives are 20 feet or more above the ground on a platform or roof top there is no limit to the number of hives.
- (iii) Hive entrances shall face away from neighboring property and in such a direction that bees fly across the beekeeper's property a sufficient distance to gain a height of six feet or above. If bordering property is within a distance of 50 feet, the use of barriers (hedges, shrubs or fencing six feet high) shall be employed to redirect the bees' flight pathway and establish bee flight pathways above head height.
- (iv) Tennessee Beekeepers shall maintain a water source near the colonies at a distance less than the nearest unnatural water supply.
- (v) No apiary shall be kept within 50 feet of an established animal that is tethered, kenneled or otherwise prevented from escaping a stinging incident.

- (vi) Tennessee Beekeepers shall avoid opening colonies for inspection or manipulation when neighbors are present or in the immediate vicinity.
 - (vii) It is strongly encouraged for Tennessee Beekeepers to avoid purchasing queens and honey bees from areas that are documented as having been designated as an established Africanized Honey Bee (AHB) zone and that they keep a record of when and from whom they have purchased queens for 3 years.
 - (viii) Tennessee Beekeepers shall manage all colonies to minimize swarming.
 - (ix) Tennessee Beekeepers shall within seven days replace queens in colonies exhibiting overly aggressive behavior that may be injurious to the general public or domesticated animals as determined by Tennessee Department of Agriculture Apiary Staff.
 - (x) Any aggressive colony that remains overly aggressive after two attempts to requeen the colony will be immediately depopulated.
 - (xi) Anyone transporting colonies shall secure the load and screen entrances or place a net over the colonies to prevent bees from escaping.
 - (xii) Tennessee Beekeepers shall properly discard all pesticides and other control agents after proper use as label directions require.
 - (xiii) Honey Bees used for public demonstrations, entertainment or educational purposes shall be enclosed so as to avoid release of honey bees to the public.
 - (xiv) The beekeeper will not extract honey from the frames outdoors and exposed to free flying honey bees
 - (xv) Tennessee Beekeepers shall manage all colonies to minimize robbing
 - (xvi) Tennessee Beekeepers will not place wet supers of extracted honey comb in an area accessible to free flying honey bees.
 - (xvii) Tennessee Beekeepers shall notify the State Apiarist immediately if they encounter an overly aggressive colony.
- (a) A Registered beekeeper signs a Voluntary Honey Bee Best Management Practices agreement to be kept on file at Tennessee Department of Agriculture headquarters.