



**Medway Beekeepers Association**

**Apiary Visitor Events Procedures,  
Risk Assessments and  
Visitor Information Sheet**

The Medway Beekeepers Association is grateful to Moray Beekeepers, and the document's author Allison Laws, for permission to reproduce this document for download on the MBKA web site.

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## Health and Safety around Honey Bees

'Health and Safety in Beekeeping' should be approached, like any other activity, by using your common sense to think about what's involved in the job before starting. In 'Health & Safety' terms this is known as carrying out a 'Risk Assessment', the purpose of which is to identify any hazards and the likelihood of something or someone being injured by those hazards. Once these have been identified a plan of action can be devised for minimising the risk of accident or injury, and what action should be taken in the event of such an occurrence.

The most common hazards connected with beekeeping are from procedures and products used in normal hive manipulations such as slips, trips and falls, stings, back strains, fire, burning, poisoning and asphyxiation. It all sounds very dangerous when put like this but in reality, accidents don't happen very often, all you have to do is apply just a little common sense!

### Where Risks Occur:

- Apiary location – proximity to other people, animals and property
- Access in and out of the apiary
- Opening and examination of stocks
- Transporting hives
- Use of potentially harmful substances
- Visitors to the apiary
- Health concerns
- Sting reactions
- Honey extraction and preparation
- Collection of swarms and observation hives

### Risks from Bees

Honey bees like bumble bees, wasps and hornets have a stinger at the posterior end of their abdomen. The sting is connected to a venom sac and is a modified egg-laying tube, so if you are stung, it was a female insect that did it.

Most stinging insects can sting more than once, the exception is the honey bee (the female worker bee) which has a barbed sting. When the worker bee escapes after stinging a person, the sting and attached venom sac are ripped out of the bee and stay in the victim's skin; the bee will die shortly afterwards.

### Hazards of being stung:

Generally, most stings only result in a temporary injury - pain, swelling, redness and itching around the sting site. However, sometimes the effects can be much more severe – and can even be life-threatening, depending on where you are stung and whether the injured person has allergies. Summon medical help if the sting is near the eyes, nose or throat.

**Normal Reaction** - Most people experience local effects like pain, swelling, itching, and redness around the sting site. Painful stings in the mouth and throat can result if you accidentally swallowed a wasp or bee (e.g., drinking a soft drink from a can that a wasp had entered).

**Mild Allergic Reaction** - Some people will experience swelling in a larger area, not just immediately around the sting site. They may develop hives but no systemic

effects (effects away from sting site like effects on breathing and blood flow). This mild allergic reaction can last a few days. The area will be sore and uncomfortable but one should not give in to the temptation to scratch the stung area. Scratching may cause a break in the skin which could lead to an infection.

**Severe Allergic Reaction** - In rare cases, a **severe allergic reaction** can occur. This situation is serious and can cause "**anaphylaxis**" or anaphylactic shock. Symptoms of anaphylaxis may appear immediately or within the first 30 minutes. The symptoms include:

- Hives, itching and swelling in areas other than the sting site,
- Swollen eyes and eyelids,
- Wheezing,
- Tightness in the chest and difficulty breathing,
- Hoarse voice or swelling of the tongue,
- Dizziness or sharp drop in blood pressure,
- Shock,
- Unconsciousness or cardiac arrest.

The "**anaphylactic reaction**" can occur the first time someone is stung or with subsequent stings. Death can occur within 30 - 45 minutes of being stung. If you see any signs of this reaction, or even if you are not sure, get medical help immediately.

People, who have had severe allergic reactions to insect stings in the past, will probably have a similar or worse reaction if stung again. Epi-pens may be available to allergic people through their Doctor.

### **The Risks:**

**To you the beekeeper** - There is always a risk of being stung when working around Honey bees, for beekeepers it is an occupational hazard. In general honey bees, bumble bees, wasps and hornets will not attack and sting unless provoked or physically attacked (or think they are being attacked).

Normal hive manipulations create a great disturbance in the colony making the bees tetchy and prone to sting anyone in close proximity. Honey bee colonies differ in temperament - some are well behaved and will tolerate fair amounts of disturbance, while others are ready to meet the beekeeper at the apiary gate, will harass them all the time they are there, and then escort them out to the car!

**To other people** – As well as the risks to the beekeeper in the apiary, there are risks to other people and property in the vicinity of the apiary. Flight paths are often quite direct and may take bees straight into areas where people are going about their normal business. Stinging occurs when individuals try to wave away bees in a manner that looks threatening.

There is always a risk to humans when apiaries are sited near to public areas such as pathways where adults, children and animals pass. The latter two are often inquisitive and may get closer than is safe.

**To property** – Honey bees must void their bowels the same as any other living creature. They do this mostly in the relative vicinity of the apiary (up to 50 metres or more) and can cause soiling of laundry, windows and vehicles.

## **Risk Management:**

The risks involved in beekeeping can be minimised to an acceptable level by following a few simple rules.

- 'Bee' Prepared!
- Site apiaries well away from areas where people and animals will be in close proximity.
- Keep the apiary tidy and free from debris, and maintain clear access ways.
- Lift only what you are comfortable lifting, get assistance if necessary.
- Always wear the correct PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) such as hat, veil, suit, gloves and footwear when working in the apiary. Make sure you maintain them in good condition and ensure you are completely bee-proof before entering the apiary.
- Ensure there are barriers to lift bee flight paths above areas where people and animals will be.
- Avoid working on hives when bees are not likely to be in good humour e.g. too cold, colony structure upset, wrong time of day, recent disturbance.
- Avoid where possible, working on hives when there is a risk of members of the public being in the vicinity.
- Exercise care when using a lighted smoker particularly during long dry spells.
- Always follow manufacturer's instructions and approved codes of practice when using chemicals and products for disease control and hygiene, and only use approved products.
- Know what you need to do in the event of an accident, and 'Bee' Prepared!

## Planning Preparation:

### Before the Meeting:

1. Plan and organise the meeting carefully.
2. Determine who will be running the meeting - **one person only**.
3. Note that **a named second person / beekeeper must be assigned and present for the meeting to proceed**.
4. Identify roles and responsibilities including first aiders.
5. Check that all essential equipment is available. (Most of the required equipment is available at the apiary site. You need to check on any special equipment required for the meeting eg. Microscopes etc.).
6. Identify what protective clothing is needed and arrange for it to be available. We can loan protective equipment (eg. suits, hoods and gloves, **no shoes**), to a number of visitors to the apiary for the duration of their visit.
7. Make sure that the landowner knows of any of your plans that may be deemed 'out of the ordinary'.
8. Make sure that any neighbours who could be affected are aware of the meeting.
9. Check environmental conditions.
10. Have a charged mobile phone to hand and know the exact location (map grid reference – or use 'what3words') of the apiary as well as access directions and the nearest public phone if one is available.
11. Identify vulnerable persons:
  - a. Age - accompanied by responsible adult?
  - b. Disability - additional measures in place?
  - c. Bee venom allergy – **risk assessment carried out?**
  - d. Medical conditions identified and measures in place.
12. Carry out a written risk assessment of the event, identifying hazards and the steps taken to minimise them and their outcomes.

### At the Meeting

1. Introduce supervisory team
2. Identify anyone attending who has any relevant medical issues. The **'Beekeeper in Charge'** should carry out a risk assessment to determine if it is possible to implement risk reduction measures if not, that person cannot participate in the meeting
3. Carry out a briefing
  - a. Dress
  - b. Behaviour - humans
  - c. Behaviour - bees, flight path, perfumes, waving arms, noise etc
  - d. Dos and don'ts
4. Make sure that all those attending are appropriately dressed.
5. Ensure disabled persons have any necessary facilities in place
6. Review conditions and cancel the meeting if you have any concerns.
7. Split group into workable units so that the apiary is not over congested.
8. Put all brace comb etc in a covered container and remove from the site.

### Onsite Spectator Briefing

Before the spectators begin to approach the hive site it will be necessary to give a short briefing talk to explain what will be happening during the session. This should include the following elements.

1. Introduce the supervisory team so that visitors know who to turn to for guidance
2. Should the weather be unsuitable for opening the hives then the '**Beekeeper in Charge**' should cancel the Apiary Meeting.
3. Advise visitors on bee behaviour
  - a. Bees are often upset by strong odours such as perfume, hair spray, aftershave etc. Spectators may have to withdraw.
  - b. Explain what will happen when opening hives and behaviour that is to be avoided such as standing in the bees' flight path, waving arms, noise etc
4. It is important that spectators must be aware that they must follow the instructions of the '**Beekeeper in Charge**' throughout the whole of the Apiary Meeting.
5. Inform the supervisor if any problems, bee stings, unwell, any concerns etc
6. Ensure that suitable clothing is worn and provide any protective clothing if necessary to those attending.
7. Once the protective clothing has been put on it will be necessary for the '**Beekeeper in Charge**' to see that all spectators are checked for being "bee tight".
8. Go through scope of work, arrangements and questions
9. Explain that at the end of the meeting that all protective clothing should continue to be worn until well clear of the apiary site, and the '**Beekeeper in Charge**' gives the instruction to remove it.

## **Emergency Procedures:**

### **Medical Emergency:**

**Bee stings**, if possible walk casualty away from bees and remove any stings. If signs of allergic reaction call emergency services giving the following information:

1. Location and access directions (map grid reference or what3words)
2. Any accessibility issues
3. Name of injured person
4. Any allergies if known
5. Any existing medical conditions if known
6. Nature of injury
7. Status of injured person

**Unconscious/immobile**, unless the person is in danger leave undisturbed and call the emergency services with the above information.

**First aid cases**, a qualified first aider is to treat the casualty as necessary and advise the individual to seek further medical help as soon as possible. The first aider is to document the treatment given and report to the committee.

### **Security emergency:**

Any anti-social or other unsafe behaviour at Medway Beekeeping Association events is not tolerated as it risks the safety of other spectators and other members of Medway Beekeeping Association. Any offending persons must be asked politely to leave the event by the person in charge. If they are unwilling to leave then the person in charge must call the police and ask for their assistance. **If you feel that asking the person to leave may jeopardise your safety then do not approach the individual, call the police directly.**

# Medway Beekeepers' Association Apiary Visitor Information Sheet

## Introduction:

***Before visiting our apiary, we would like to give you some information that will make your visit more enjoyable and most importantly keep you as safe as possible.***

Bees are social animals and their whole lives are concerned with making the colony in which they live as successful as possible. They **do not** wish to sting you in fact when they do it kills the bee, so they have to have a really good reason to do so.

The problem is that protecting the hive is one of those reasons and having a great big bear / human opening their hive can make them very upset if it is not done properly. This is why it is important to make sure that we do everything we can to not upset the bees and protect the people visiting our apiary.

## What happens if I am stung?

When a bee stings you, it injects an amount of venom into your body via its sting. Unlike many other stinging insects, however, honey bees leave their sting behind and this continues to pump venom into you until the venom sac is empty. Therefore, if you are stung it is important to remove the stinger as soon as possible and you can do this by simply scraping the sting off your skin with a hard edge, e.g. the edge of a credit card. For the **majority** of people, the effects of being stung are no more than a small amount of swelling, irritation and pain. There are some exceptions to this if you are stung in the mouth or throat, or have an allergy. People, who have had severe allergic reactions to insect stings in the past, will probably have a similar or worse reaction if stung again.

***It is therefore vital that you inform us before visiting if you have an allergy to bee or other insect stings. Some susceptible individuals can go into anaphylactic shock when stung by bees and this can have serious and potentially fatal consequences.***

## What do I need to wear when visiting the apiary?

You do not need to buy any specific clothing when visiting the apiary as we have a supply of protective equipment (suits, hoods and gloves, **no shoes**) we can loan you during your visit. If you have your own bee suit / gloves however please bring these with you.

You are outdoors and exposed to the weather so you should ideally wear Wellington boots, other types of boot or stout walking shoes (**no heels or open tops**) and clothing appropriate to the weather expected. If you have a zip up anorak please wear it.

Bees are very sensitive to smell so it is advisable not to wear strong perfumes, aftershave, deodorants etc.

## Other:

Please make us aware of any pre-existing medical conditions that may affect your safety while visiting the apiary.

You will be escorted at all times by an experienced beekeeper and briefed at the beginning of your visit. In order to ensure the health and safety of yourself and others it is essential to follow the advice you are given. Bees are very sensitive to changes in their environment and inappropriate behaviour around them may create risks to persons.

Many bees will be flying about but remember that you are wearing a protective suit. If you find that you are disturbed by the bees' behaviour then simply walk away from the hives and wait for one of the instructors to join you. Anyone behaving inappropriately will be asked to leave the apiary.

## Medway Beekeepers' Check List

### Pre-Meeting Check:

Venue: .....

Six Figure Map Reference: .....

Date/Time: .....

Duty Beekeeper: .....

Assistants: .....

First Aider: .....

First Aid Kit on site: Y / N

Mobile Phone Reception checked: Y / N

Mobile Phone No: .....

Nearest public phone (if one is available): .....

Directions for Access: .....

.....

### Attendance Register

I acknowledge that by signing this register, I accept the risks associated with attending the MBKA apiary: Please sign in a space below:


### Checks on the day:

Weather OK: Y / N

Apiary checked for safety: Y / N

Bee temperament Y / N

Any medical issues: Y / N

Meeting to proceed: Y / N

Signature: .....

### Post meeting feedback / incidents:

.....

.....

## MBKA Apiary Risk Assessment (Version 2019)

Ref	Hazard	Probability	Consequence	Mitigation	Probability
RA/1	Stung by Bee	Med	Anaphylactic reaction, death Allergic reaction, major injury	Health Screening questionnaire, exclude known individuals from area, PPE, Induction Briefing, Trained personnel escort and supervision at all times, emergency procedures in place Health Screening questionnaire, PPE, Induction Briefing, Trained personnel escort and supervision at all times, emergency procedures, in place, first aider available at all times	Low
RA/2	Multiple stings	Med	Discomfort, minor injury Major Injury/Death	Health Screening questionnaire, PPE, Induction Briefing, Trained personnel escort and supervision at all times, emergency procedures in place, first aider available at all times Health Screening questionnaire , exclude known individuals from area, PPE, Induction Briefing, Trained personnel escort and supervision at all times, emergency procedures in place	Low
RA/3	Lone Working	High	Lack of assistance In an emergency	If working in the MBKA Apiary with bees, lone working is not allowed.	Low
RA/5	Hazardous Chemicals	Med	Minor/Major injury	COSH assessments to be followed, BKA recommended procedures to be followed, appropriate PPE worn	Low
RA/6	Slips and Trips	Med	Minor/Major injury	Keep walkways and access areas clear and well maintained at all times, visitors to remain on designated areas, appropriate footwear to be worn on site	Low
RA/7	Manual Handling Injuries	Med	Minor/Major injury	No single lifts of hives to be carried out, no visitors to lift hives, Separate Risk Assessment to be carried out for all lifts not hives and greater than 25kg	Low
RA/8	Use of Work Equipment	Med	Minor/Major injury	Only use equipment for its intended purpose and according to manufacturers recommendations, use correct PPE	Low
RA/9	Violence	Low	Minor/Major injury	Follow emergency procedure, call emergency services	Low
RA/10	Honey extraction	Low	Minor/Major injury	Only use equipment for its intended purpose and according to manufacturers recommendations	Low

## Risk Assessment Review Record

Version	Review Date	Review Completed	Who	Changed		Additions	
				Ref	Details	Ref	Details
2019	New Policy		PL				
2022	31/01/2022	31/01/2022	PL	/2	No Changes made	N/A	

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 Compiled by Paul Lawrence