

## **Working Around Stinging Insects**

by Mike Sikula, NYS Bureau of Weights & Measures

After a long cold winter, most weights and measures officials are preparing to take on testing better done in warmer weather (e.g. vehicle scales, dispensers at marinas, propane meters, animal scales, etc.). With these tests often comes the surprising and sometimes painful run-in with stinging insects such as bees and wasps. For years, I have heard inspectors tell me that bees must love petroleum because we seem to find them all the time near propane and gasoline tanks. So, as you make your plans to take on your outdoor duties please keep the following in mind:

When it comes to bees, wasps and hornets the stinger is a modified egg-laying tube. So, if you get stung, it was a female.

Each species has a different favorite nesting spot but, in general, be on the lookout for them under eaves, platforms, inside housings and junction boxes, in the ground near your work area or in any type of abandoned items (e.g. tires, crates, cars, etc.)

Generally, most stings will result in a temporary injury, which includes pain, swelling, and redness around the sting. However, sometimes the effects can be more severe, even life-threatening, depending on where you are stung and what allergies you have. BE CAREFUL!

In rare cases, a severe allergic reaction can occur. This situation is life threatening and can cause "anaphylaxis" or anaphylactic shock. In these instances, 911 must be called immediately!

Before starting work at a site, look around; be wary of any insects flying in and out of a hole or location. Also, listen for any insect buzzing sounds.

Power equipment such as motors and pumps can aggravate insects and cause them to swarm.

Avoid wearing perfumes, colognes, scented soaps, or powders as they contain fragrances that can attract insects.

If you encounter stinging insects at a job site, try to avoid swatting at them as this only aggravates them more. Do not try spraying them with insecticide as this may lead to a swarm attacking.

Dealing with stinging insects is the responsibility of the device owner/manager. Calmly leave the area and report to them so they can take appropriate action. An exception to this would be if you have disturbed a nest and hear "wild" buzzing. In this case protect your face with your hands and run from the area immediately.

Weights and measures inspectors work in a wide variety of areas and may encounter potential hazards on the job. The best defense is knowledge and a plan for how to handle situations when things go wrong.