

# Rapid Lesson Sharing

Event Type: **Bee and Wasp Alert**

Date: Fall 2015

Location: Pacific Northwest Region



*As many as 9 of the 21 major incidents currently active in the Pacific Northwest Region are reporting that bee/wasp stings and bites are the trending safety concern and medical incidents that are being reported. Dozens of firefighters are being affected daily. Stings are primarily on the hands and arms, but have been reported in the throat and tongue. Reactions have been minor to anaphylactic.*

RLS Team

## NARRATIVE

During the late summer and fall 2015 fire siege in the Pacific Northwest Region, a reoccurring environmental factor has led to multiple personal injuries. Wild bees and wasps are stinging and injuring multiple firefighters every day.

In general, bees and wasps sting to protect their hive and when they feel threatened (like being swatted at or stepped on). Colonies vary in behavior over time, especially with changes in season, becoming more aggressive and easily agitated in the late summer and fall. This is due to their food sources becoming more limited.

*Use additional caution when operating heavy equipment and power tools that produce sound vibrations, such as chainsaws and pumps.*



*A Yellow Jacket Ground Nest.*

Bee and wasps nests are found in a wide variety of locations, such as holes, cracks and crevices within trees and rocks, debris piles, and hanging from branches.

Use additional caution when operating heavy equipment and power tools that produce sound vibrations, such as chainsaws and pumps.

## LESSONS – REMINDERS

- ✓ Before starting work, first scout the area for bee/wasp habitat. Be alert for groups of flying bees entering or leaving an opening and listen for buzzing sounds. If you notice more than just a few bees in an area, their nest is nearby. Be especially alert when scouting and constructing fire line and moving logs. DO NOT put your hands where you can't see them.
- ✓ If you get stung on the hand, be sure to remove your ring because of swelling.

- ✓ Before you start on the fire line know how you and your crew members will react to a bee or wasp sting. Take appropriate precautions if you or a crewmember may be allergic to bees. This may include adjusting your operational assignment, carrying Benadryl or other antihistamine or an Epi-Pen. If you are stung, what is your trigger point to actually use the Epi-Pen and medical evacuation?
- ✓ Be familiar with the local medical incident protocol.
- ✓ If you disturb a nest and are being attacked, run away. Use your shroud or shirt to protect your head, neck and face. Swatting and waving your arms aggravates bees/wasps more! Once clear of the nest site, communicate the hazard to other resources on the Division and—if it is safe to do so—flag the area.
- ✓ If a bee or wasp is in your vehicle calmly pull over in a safe location to let the bee out.
- ✓ It is recommended by some of the medical staff on these fire incidents that all firefighters carry an antihistamine. This is because some people who have been stung in the past may have an enzyme build-up in them that could cause a severe reaction.
- ✓ Some firefighters have been stung inside their mouth after a bee has landed on their food. Look at what you are eating and drinking. Bees and wasps seek sweet foods and drinks. Yellow jackets seek out meat.



*A Paper Wasp Nest in Tree.*

## Two Reaction Types to Bee/Wasp Stings

### 1. Local Reactions

A local reaction is usually characterized by pain, swelling, redness, itching, and a wheel surrounding the wound made by the stinger. Swelling can sometimes be locally severe. For instance, if stung on the finger, the arm may be swollen even up to the elbow. Even though it may be alarming, swelling such as this is fairly common. Swelling may be reduced by cooling the wound and/or taking an antihistamine such as Benadryl. Topical solutions such as calamine may also help alleviate pain.

### 2. Systemic, Allergic, or Life-Threatening Reactions

Allergic reactions can develop anywhere on the body and may include rash or hives, dizziness or headache, cramps, nausea, vomiting, swelling beyond the general area of the sting, shortness of breath or difficulty swallowing, shock and unconsciousness. If you experience any of these symptoms, seek emergency medical assistance immediately. Symptoms can begin immediately following the sting or up to 30 minutes later and might last for hours.

Check out even more info and lessons on bees and wasps in this “6 Minutes for Safety”



[Bees and Wasps 6 Minutes](#)

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Pacific Northwest Wildfire  
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