

Delaware beekeepers can join BeeCheck protection program

DOVER – Delaware beekeepers can now participate in a new online tool to help protect them from pesticides that may drift due to weather or wind.

The BeeCheck program allows beekeepers to add their state-registered beehives to the DriftWatch map, a voluntary program that helps beekeepers and pesticide applicators communicate and share information. The program had previously been open to commercial beekeepers only. Interested beekeepers should visit <http://dda.delaware.gov/pesticides/Driftwatch.shtml> for more information.

“We wanted to help our state’s beekeepers have more open communication with pesticide applicators, and vice-versa,” said Chris Wade, pesticides compliance administrator for the Delaware Department of Agriculture. “Expanding this tool to a wider group can only help both groups improve that dialogue.”

The free DriftWatch program provides an online map to alert pesticide applicators to sensitive areas near application sites. Applicators can then take special precautions to avoid drifting onto those areas. Enrolling a location does not guarantee that pesticides are not sprayed near a property, but instead aims to improve awareness of pesticide use and reduce instances of drift exposure.

The initiative comes as Delaware continues work on its Managed Pollinator Protection Plan, which outlines strategies and techniques to protect and enhance bee populations in the state. Comments on the draft plan were accepted through March 15, and DDA is now reviewing them.

Delaware has about 270 registered beekeepers who have between 2,000 and 3,000 hives. Farmers bring in another 3,000 bee

colonies each year to maximize crop pollination. Pollinated crops include watermelon, cucumbers, strawberries, cantaloupes, apples, blueberries, cranberries, squash and pumpkins.

The Department of Agriculture regulates pesticide applicators through a rigorous training and certification process, registers all pesticides used in Delaware, and investigates complaints about pesticide drift or improper application. Drift can occur because of high winds, weather conditions, or application errors.

Wade said DDA handles a handful of complaints each year, with most dealt with amicably between applicators and growers or landowners.

Developed by Purdue University staff members, DriftWatch is now run by a Purdue-created nonprofit organization. Twelve states are now participating in DriftWatch. Delaware is the only one on the East Coast, though Maryland operates a similar program.

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