

Theft, Vandalism, and Other Related Crime in the Beekeeping Industry: A Guide for Beekeepers¹

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Beekeepers are not immune to crime. Most often, crime within the beekeeping industry involves the theft or vandalism of hives. It is important that beekeepers are aware of all of the resources available to them in the event of hive/equipment/property theft or vandalism. The best defense against beekeeping-related crime is prevention.

Recommendations for Crime Prevention in Beekeeping Operations

The first step in crime prevention is to follow Florida law and ensure that hives are registered with the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Plant Industry Apiary Section (FDACS - DPI). When a beekeeper registers his/her bee colonies, he/she receives a unique identification number, always beginning in FL0-. According to Florida law, "All honey bee hives must be permanently imprinted on the upper left-hand corner in letters at least ½ inch in height with the beekeeper's registration number issued by the Department. Beekeepers with honey bee hives branded with a numerical or alphabetical code before November 22, 1988, shall not be required to rebrand with the registration number, provided the existing brand is registered with the Department. This number may be applied with paint, permanent ink marker or legible permanent marking method" such as a hot brand. (For more information on Florida apiary inspection laws, see:

<https://www.fdacs.gov/Divisions-Offices/Plant-Industry/Bureaus-and-Services/Plant-and-Apiary-Inspection/Apiary-Inspection#rules>.

In addition to imprinting hives with the FLO number, beekeepers should create a unique brand to use on all their equipment which will assist law enforcement officials in readily identifying the property. Beekeepers should also consider the following recommendations:

1. Imprint all equipment, including, honey supers, frames, lids, bottom boards, pallets, etc. with the FLO number or the personal brand unique to the beekeeper.
2. Have someone monitor apiary locations at least weekly.
3. Choose hives at random and affix GPS tracking devices. Companies specializing in this equipment can be found on the Internet.
4. Keep detailed records of the number of colonies and the amount of equipment in each apiary location. Note when hives were moved onto the property and when they were removed.
5. Record all equipment sales and purchases, especially when equipment was acquired from or sold to another beekeeper.

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6. Fence in the apiary(ies) whenever possible.
7. Place colonies away from roadways, footpaths, or other areas where people frequent. The best policy is out of sight, out of mind.
8. Maintain contact with your local apiary inspector, and make him aware of your apiary sites to help reduce theft and vandalism.
9. Keep your FDACS apiary certificates current and carry them with you, especially when traveling with hives.

Florida Dept. of Agriculture and Consumer Services, Division of Plant Industry, Apiary Section— <https://www.fdacs.gov/Divisions-Offices/Plant-Industry/Bureaus-and-Services/Plant-and-Apiary-Inspection/Apiary-Inspection#rules>

Florida Department of Law Enforcement— <http://www.fdle.state.fl.us/>

University of Florida Honey Bee Research and Extension Lab—www.UFhoneybee.com

What to Do if Hives/Equipment Are Stolen or Vandalized

Below are recommended actions a beekeeper should take if his or her beekeeping equipment is vandalized or stolen:

1. Contact the local sheriff's office and report the incident.
2. Contact the Office of Agricultural Law Enforcement by calling 1-800-342-5869 to report the incident and county. Some Agricultural Officers cover more than one county; make sure they receive the report so an investigation can commence (see <https://www.fdacs.gov/Divisions-Offices/Agricultural-Law-Enforcement>). Most counties have an Agricultural Law Enforcement Officer, but if not, there is often someone at the Sheriff's office assigned to agriculture-related crimes.
3. Contact the FDACS-DPI Apiary Section to report the vandalism or theft. The Chief of Apiary Inspection will inform all Florida's apiary inspectors to watch for any equipment bearing your FLO number and personal brand.
4. Relocate the apiary as soon as local officials have completed their investigation.

Without ways of identifying equipment as belonging to the beekeeper, law enforcement officials have a more difficult job of proving the theft. Beekeepers who follow the recommendations in this document have a better chance of recovering their stolen property.

Resources for Beekeepers

Office of Agricultural Law Enforcement—<https://www.fdacs.gov/Divisions-Offices/Agricultural-Law-Enforcement>, 1-800-342-5869