

THE PEST MANAGEMENT ALLIANCE

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Code of Practice: Relating to the Control of Feral Honey Bees

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Introduction

Honey Bees Are Beneficial And Vital Insects

Honey bees, both feral (semi-wild) and colonised, are important beneficial insects, and are not normally considered as pests. They live either in rare cases in the wild in nests as feral colonies, or more normally, as colonies in hives managed by beekeepers. In either case, they will only sting people if strongly provoked.

Because of their beneficial role, every effort should be made to avoid carrying out control treatments against honey bees. Treatment with a pesticide should be considered only as the last resort.

Risks from Treated Nests

If foraging non-target honey bees find a nest which has been treated, they may come into contact with the treatment and may carry away contaminated honey. This can lead to contamination of honey destined for food use, serious bee kills, and the destruction of hives. This can amount to the loss of hundreds of pounds worth of honey and stock.



Process

Is Treatment Required?

If asked to treat a feral honey bee nest, you should assess the situation carefully.

- Have people been stung by honey bees from the nest, or are they at risk because of its location?
- If the nest is not causing any risk to public health then you should carefully consider the alternatives before carrying out a treatment.
- If the swarm has only recently formed where possible it should be left undisturbed and allowed to move on. This will usually occur within 48 hours.
- If the swarm is in a sensitive area and is easily accessible, it can probably be collected and re-housed in a suitable hive. If you do not have the expertise to do this, contact the local branch/division of the British Beekeeper's Association for assistance.
- If the swarm has already invaded a property, it is unlikely that it can be collected, but if it has only recently taken up residence in a chimney, it may be possible to persuade it to move on using non-pesticidal smoke. This is time critical; if a swarm has taken up residence in a building or void is it wise to assume that they have been in situ for more than 48 hours. This is enough time for the swarm to build comb and for the queen to resume egg laying. This will mean that the swarm is now established and will not move on. Do not take the testimony of your client unless it can be proved that the swarm has recently arrived.
- If the swarm has been in residence for some time (more than 6 months) it will not be possible to get it to move on, so it may be necessary to take control action. It would be best to do this during the Winter from January to mid-March, when the honey cells are capped and the stores are at their lowest. The numbers of bees at this time will also be at their lowest levels. This will reduce the quantity of pesticide required and will allow for an efficient and clean removal of the contaminated comb and stores - if the client can be persuaded to live with the bees until then.
- Post treatment, it is inevitable that there will be some residual smells from the honey and comb following removal, also the queen pheromone will be lingering. This will make it more likely that another swarm may take residence the following year as the smell of an old colony can be irresistible to scouts looking for a new nest site. It is therefore recommended that the smell be masked or destroyed. There are several deodorising compounds on the market but if unobtainable, creosote oil or Jeyes fluid are an excellent substitute.
- Finally, the decision to treat will depend on whether it is possible to close off the entrance(s) to the nest after treatment. It may be possible to use extension lances to get the insecticide to the nest, but it may require access equipment in order to close off entrances safely. If the client is not prepared to pay for this, then it will not be possible to carry out a treatment legally.
- Treatment with a non residual insecticide may be possible. Blocking off gaps is still required, because all pesticides have a half life where they are still viable after application, it is therefore possible given the right conditions for foragers from other managed hives to find the unattended honeycomb and call their own hive into robbing mode within 12-24 hours.

What precautions should you take?

Spray Liaison Scheme

If you consider treatment is the best option, make use of the British Beekeepers Association's spray liaison scheme. This will enable local beekeepers to be warned by their own Spray Liaison Officer. It is important for you to talk to local beekeepers in this way before treating a nest. Remember, members of the British Beekeepers Association can provide advice and can sometimes remove accessible feral honey bee colonies, avoiding the need to use pesticides.

Working at height

The entrances to feral bees nests are often high up on a building, sometimes associated with the chimney. If this is the case, then consideration may need to be given to working from access equipment in order to carry out the treatment and to cap off the entrance to the nest. This introduces all the hazards involved with working at height and this work should only be attempted by technicians suitably trained technicians.

Working with chimney flues

If the nest is associated with a chimney, care should be taken to assess whether the nest is inside the flue or in the cavity surrounding the flue. If inside the flue, the implications of sealing it off are potentially serious if it is still in use. It is strongly recommended that no treatment be carried out until arrangements have been put in place to remove the combs, which may involve the partial demolition and rebuilding of the chimney.

Competence of Technician

In accordance with the Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986, only technicians who have been suitably trained in the use of the appropriate insecticide, application equipment and personal protective equipment, so that they are competent to do the work, should carry out such a treatment.

Choice of Insecticide

Only insecticides that are 'Approved for Use' by the HSE should be used. The label should be read in detail and all instructions followed. Ideally, only those products that specifically mention 'feral bees' on the list of insects that can be treated with the product should be used.

Prevent other bees from gaining access to the treated nest

The requirement to "**take every reasonable action to prevent foraging honey bees from gaining access to the treated nest, by removing the combs or blocking the nest entrances**" still applies, even though this phrase may not be on the label of the product concerned.

This requirement is implicit in the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985 with reference to non-target species and is of particular importance in this situation given the likelihood of neighbouring bee colonies robbing the treated nest.

Timing of the treatment

To reduce the risk of bees from other colonies gaining access to the treated nest whilst ensuring that all bees from the problem colony are controlled, it may be appropriate for the treatment to be carried out just before dusk, with the nest entrances being closed as soon as possible (ie first thing the next day).

Risk and COSHH Assessments

In accordance with The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, a suitable and sufficient risk assessment for site activities and actions and a COSHH assessment for pesticide preparations must also be documented. The final choice of the product to use will depend on the site-specific risk assessment, which should be in writing, which will in turn affect the COSHH Assessment.

Waste Disposal

If you become involved with the removal of the treated honey combs, these must be treated as 'Controlled Waste' and disposed of via a licensed waste carrier to a licensed waste contractor as 'Non-Hazardous Waste'. Use a "Duty of Care Transfer Note" to legalise the transfer to another person. The recommended EWC Code is 20.01.99, as for dead mice, rats, insects and pigeons. Use of a biocide such as a 1% bendiocarb on the honey combs or other associated debris materials would not render the waste 'hazard classified' ie H14-ecotoxic would not be invoked. Other biocides would need to be assessed to ascertain if any hazard classification of the treated materials was appropriate. The EWC Code may depend on the types of pesticide used to kill the nest, and is at the discretion of the individual.

NB The Animal By-Products Regulations 2005 do not apply to creatures killed during the course of pest control activity.

Points to remember

- Assess the situation carefully before treating.
- Record your findings in written Risk and COSHH Assessments and an in-depth treatment report.
- If it is possible to solve the problem without the use of pesticides, this course of action should be taken.
- If a pesticide treatment is considered essential:
- Make use of the British Beekeepers Association's spray liaison scheme.
- Only use an HSE-approved insecticide.
- Always read the label and use pesticides safely.
- Take every reasonable action to prevent foraging honey bees from gaining access to the treated nest, by removing the combs or blocking the nest entrances.

If this is not possible, do not conduct the treatment.

Related Legislation

- Food and Environment Protection Act 1985
- Control of Pesticides Regulations 1986 and 1987 as amended
- Health & Safety at Work etc. Act 1974
- Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999
- Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002 as amended
- Biocidal Product Regulations 2001 as amended

For further advice, please contact:

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