

Code of Practice

Relating to the Control of Feral Honey Bees

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INTRODUCTION

HONEY BEES ARE BENEFICIAL INSECTS

Honey bees, both feral (wild) and colonised, are important beneficial insects, not normally considered as pests. They live either in the wild in nests, or as colonies in hives kept 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 will carry away contaminated honey. This can lead to contamination of honey destined for food use, serious bee kills, and the destruction of hives.

RELATED LEGISLATION

Food and Environment Protection Act 1985
Control of Pesticides regulations 1986
Health & Safety at Work Act 1974
Control of Substances Hazardous to Health

PROCESS

Should you treat?

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 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 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, it may be possible to persuade it to move on using non-pesticidal smoke.
- If the swarm has been in residence for some time, it may not be possible to get it to move on, so it may be necessary to take control action, but it would be best to do this during the Winter, when the honey cells are capped and there are fewer foraging bees around - if the client can be persuaded to live with the bees until then.

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 the entrance safely. If the client is not prepared to pay for this, then it will not be possible to carry out a treatment legally.

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 bee's 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 in this.

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. As there are very few such products, it may be appropriate to use another product that has a more general usage, such as for the control of 'flying insects' in the type of premises concerned.

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 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 Contractor as 'Non-Hazardous Waste' and you should obtain a 'Consignment Note' for your records. The EWC Code should be 20.03.99, as for dead mice, rats, insects and pigeons.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

Assess the situation carefully before treating.

Record your findings in written Risk and COSHH Assessments.

If it is possible to solve the problem without the use of pesticides, this course of action should be taken.

If a pesticidal 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.

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For further advice, please contact:

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