



# Honey Bees and Pesticides

*Persons using pesticides, whether they are the general public, gardeners, professionals such as farmers, land managers, spray contractors and pest controllers are required to use them correctly. In all cases it is a legal requirement to use as directed on the product label.*

## **Always Read the Label – Use Pesticides Safely**

For many years beekeepers and the agricultural users of pesticides have operated Spray Liaison Schemes which are intended to alert beekeepers to the potential exposure of their bees to applications of pesticides in their vicinity and enable them to take appropriate action.

These schemes have been operated through the British Beekeepers Association (BBKA), Area and local beekeeping associations and many have appointed Spray Liaison Officers and these have held records of where their members' hives were located.

Effective communication is a big contributor to alerting the user of pesticides to their potential risks to honey bees.

Beekeepers can be further reassured about the safety of their bees if they have made the landowner aware of where their bees are situated and have provided contact details so they can be alerted in good time before a spray application is made.

This document is intended to encourage beekeepers to make known the presence of their hives and to make the users of pesticides aware of their responsibilities and inform beekeepers of any potential threat to their bees.

- There is a Code of Practice for using plant protection products (January 2006). This can be found on: [www.pesticides.gov.uk/farmers\\_growers\\_home.asp#Codes\\_of\\_Practice](http://www.pesticides.gov.uk/farmers_growers_home.asp#Codes_of_Practice)
- The Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme (WIIS) has produced a leaflet dated 2003, titled 'Incidents Involving Pesticides and Animals', PB8003.
- The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has produced a leaflet 'Feral honey bees - Points to consider when asked to treat a honey bee nest', INDG 276 5/99.

## **Code of Practice**

*CODE OF PRACTICE FOR USING PLANT PROTECTION PRODUCTS (JAN 2006)*

This code of practice covers plant protection products used in agriculture, amenity, horticulture and forestry.

The code of practice covers all aspects of the safe use of pesticides including safeguarding the environment and human health. It requires the assessment of possible environmental effects and identification of precautions which should be taken to protect wildlife and the environment.

It describes the practices and procedures that users of plant protection products should follow in order to minimise any adverse impacts on non-target organisms such as honey bees.

Beekeepers are recommended to obtain a copy so that they can understand the obligations of the users of pesticides towards honey bees and, when the beekeeper is arranging for permission to place hives on a landowners' property and be able to remind the landowner of their obligation towards honey bees.

Pesticides might be used on flowering crops including top and soft fruit, oilseed rape, beans, cereals, maize and pea crops, where there are neighbouring flowering crops, and/or where there are flowering weeds and wild flowers.

## **Responsibilities**

*THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PESTICIDE USER TO THE ENVIRONMENT (INCLUDING HONEY BEES)*

Any user of a pesticide (including farmers/spray contractors/gardeners/horticulturalists/forestry and amenity area worker) is responsible for ensuring that when planning to use a pesticide they should assess the possible environmental effects to identify which precautions they should take to protect wildlife and the environment (including honey bees). This involves making an environmental risk assessment as described in the Code of Practice.

## **Checks**

*CHECK THE PRODUCT PROPERTIES SPECIFICALLY FOR POSSIBLE EFFECTS ON HONEY BEES*

Products that may affect bees will be labelled as one of

- Harmful to bees
- Dangerous to bees
- Extremely dangerous to bees
- High risk to bees

This could affect your risk assessment and choice of product. If the product does not specifically refer to honey bees you should still read and carefully follow the instructions for its use.

## **INFORM**

- Beekeepers identified in your risk assessment.
- If you are not aware of any beekeepers but want to make doubly sure; contact the local beekeeping association and ask if they have a Spray Liaison Officer who could provide you with the information you require to contact the beekeepers with colonies at risk.
- Do this
  - o 48 hours before you plan to use a pesticide at times of the year when bees are at risk
  - o Or whenever you intend to use a pesticide that specifically harms bees
  - o Tell the beekeeper(s) if you change your plans

**(Note:** It is envisaged that BeeBase (<https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase>) will be developed to provide farmers and spray contractors with the ability to access information to tell them of the location of honey bee colonies within a pre-determined area of the crop to be sprayed).

## Measures for protecting bees

(taken from the Code of Practice)

DO	DO NOT
Check for bees visiting plants and remember that honeydew produced by aphids is attractive to bees.	Spray unless you have to.
Follow the environmental protection instructions on the label and the guidance in this code.	Use pesticides labelled 'harmful', 'dangerous', 'extremely dangerous' or 'high risk' to bees if crops or weeds are in open flower or part bloom, unless this is allowed by the product label or mix products in the spray tank unless allowed with instructions for use of the products.
Spray in the evening when bees have stopped flying, as this allows several hours for the pesticide to dry before bees become active again. Remember that bumblebees might be around to look for food later into the evening than honey bees.	Let pesticide drift into bee hives or into hedgerows or fields where bees, including bumblebees, may be looking for food.
Choose a cool cloudy day, or the early morning (if you have to spray during the day).	

### WHAT SHOULD BEEKEEPERS DO TO HELP THEIR BEES?

If your bees are likely to have access to and forage on crops or vegetation likely to be sprayed, contact the farmer and/or landowner and leave them your details (for example use the attached form).

- o Provide them with a copy of this leaflet.
- o Suggest they obtain a copy of the Crop Protection Association (CPA) leaflet - 'Bee Safe Bee Careful - When using insecticides' available from: [www.cropprotection.org.uk/library.aspx](http://www.cropprotection.org.uk/library.aspx)
- o Ask them to give you good notice (**48 hours before use**) of when they intend to spray as in accordance with the Code of Practice.
- o Ask them to tell you if they change their plans.

As a further reassurance and the prevention of causing unnecessary concern to the beekeeper, ask them to contact you when they intend to carry out **any** spraying operations on crops / vegetation which your bees may be visiting.

### WHAT PRACTICAL MEASURES CAN THE BEEKEEPER TAKE ONCE INFORMED ABOUT AN INTENTION TO SPRAY?

Shutting the bees inside the hive at any time runs the risk of the bees dying by overheating through lack of ventilation and also the combs melting and drowning the bees in wax and honey. If possible try and provide some shading of the hives in full sun. Covering the entrance with loose grass may be sufficient to keep the bees in the hive and at the same time allowing them to draw fresh air into the hive. Remember to remove the grass when the danger has passed.

If your hives are in or very close to the edge of the crop provide tall markers to show the sprayer where hives are located as they can easily be dwarfed by tall crops such as oilseed rape.

### WHAT SHOULD THE BEEKEEPER DO IN THE EVENT OF POSSIBLE HONEY BEE COLONY DAMAGE CAUSED BY SPRAYING ?

If one or more colonies in your apiary suddenly have a large number of dead or dying bees outside the hive then:

- o Collect a sample of at least 200 bees (equivalent to a 1lb honey jar full) per affected colony, initially into a container labelling the container with the colony number/identifying mark.
- o Take photographs (remember to have the date and time record facility on the camera switched on) of the site
  - o including landscape features which will enable any subsequent investigators of the incident to locate the site,
  - o the crop you suspect was being sprayed and
  - o of the affected colonies
- o Transfer the bees into a container suitable for freezing and place them in the freezer. Label the container with the colony number/identifying mark, apiary location and date. Keep the samples in the freezer.
- o If possible find the name of the product which has been used as this will aid in its analysis and identification.
- o Contact your local bee inspector (if contact details are known) or contact the National Bee Unit (NBU) 01904 462510 or email [nbu@fera.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:nbu@fera.gsi.gov.uk)
- o Or contact the Wildlife Incident Investigation Service (WIIS) on 0800 321 600. The WIIS officer will report the incident to the NBU and they are likely to ask the bee inspector to make a site visit.
- o Do not send the sample bees until requested and follow the instructions given for packaging and sending the samples.
- o Ask for advice from the bee inspector or the officer from WIIS about what to do with the affected colonies before taking any action.

Further information on WIIS can be found on <http://www.pesticides.gov.uk/environment.asp?id=58>

There is a separate form L019A supplied with this leaflet to help those who are spraying pesticides to inform the beekeeper.

### General Notes:

This leaflet is one of a series intended to help beekeepers and non-beekeepers. If you believe the contents of this leaflet are relevant to you, please seek further advice from an experienced beekeeper or your tutor.

Information is updated regularly – please check with the BBKA web site at: [www.bbka.org.uk](http://www.bbka.org.uk) – for the latest information.

Note: The same information is published in our printed leaflet L019 available from the BBKA.

### Disclaimer:

This leaflet is provided for general interest and information only and is not intended to provide specific advice for any individual. BBKA make no representations or warranties about the accuracy or suitability for any purpose of the information contained in this document. No liability is accepted for any injury or loss arising out of the contents or information published within this leaflet.

© October 2011 – **The British Beekeepers Association**

National Beekeeping Centre, Stoneleigh Park, Kenilworth, Warwickshire CV8 2LG England

Telephone: 02476 696 679 • Facsimile: 02476 690 682

Email: [admin@britishbeekeepers.com](mailto:admin@britishbeekeepers.com) • Web: [www.bbka.org.uk](http://www.bbka.org.uk)

The BBKA is a UK Registered Charity No: 212025

