

## 9

# Pesticide Poisoning

## 9.1 Contact

The Scottish Beekeepers' Association is no longer providing a central Spray Liaison Officer. It is very difficult for a single individual to be able to provide the most essential piece of information, which is warning about impending spraying operations, across the whole of the country, in a sufficiently prompt and accurate manner to all SBA members who may be affected.

Instead the SBA is now encouraging each affiliated Local Beekeeping Association to set up its own Spray Liaison work-force. The details of exactly how that should be organised and run will undoubtedly vary from one area to another within Scotland, as conditions are very variable across the country. However the SBA hopes to gather from Local Associations a pool of useful knowledge about particular practices which have been found to work well.

Below are some initial suggestions of what may be needed, but these should only be regarded as guidelines to be refined in future.

## 9.2 Spray Liaison

Both Farmers and Spray Contractors have a statutory duty to inform all those who may be affected when they propose to conduct agricultural pesticide spraying (see below). Among those who must be warned are beekeepers keeping bees within or near an area to be sprayed. However clearly this cannot be achieved if those conducting the spraying do not know who is keeping bees near an area being sprayed.

It is therefore suggested that a local Spray Liaison work-force should first of all encourage all beekeepers within their Association to notify them of roughly where they keep their bees, and to keep that information up to date.

Secondly that work-force must provide a reliable contact point, preferably by telephone or email, which farmers and spray contractors are aware of. This may be difficult to arrange, but contact with the National Farmers Union and the Agricultural Register of Spray Contractors may be useful starting points.

When notification of intention to spray is received, the accurate description of exactly where and when spraying is planned is vital. Otherwise the notification of beekeepers involved is impossible.

Thirdly, when information of proposed spraying has been received it must be passed on promptly, to enable affected beekeepers to move or enclose their bees as appropriate, before spraying takes place.

## 9.3 Action in the case of suspected pesticide poisoning

In the event of suspected honeybee poisoning the beekeeper concerned should be advised to:-

- Inspect the brood box of the affected colony in the presence of another experienced beekeeper to establish whether the symptoms, shown by dead bees, could have been due to other causes, e.g. disease or starvation.
- Take samples of both dead and dying bees from each colony affected. These should be put in a freezer immediately. Ideally take and seal two samples from each colony in the presence of a reliable witness. Retain one sample of each colony in case of later need and submit the other as instructed. Elizabeth Sharp of SASA is now taking responsibility for investigating such cases. Her name and address are Elizabeth Sharp, Science and Advice for Scottish Agriculture (SASA), Bee Diseases Section, 1 Roddinglaw Road, Edinburgh EH12 9JF (Phone 0131-244-8874 or 0800-321600). Ideally the sample should have, say, 300 bees. They should be packed in paper or cardboard, not plastic, which causes the sample to deteriorate rapidly.
- Report the incident to the nearest Scottish Government Rural Payments and Inspections Directorate (SGRPID) Regional Office immediately. The address of your nearest one can be found in your telephone directory under SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT or from the pages at the end of the Bee Diseases section of this Manual.
- If possible obtain the names and addresses of any witnesses of the actual spraying. If it seems that poisoning is due to spraying of crops, in full or partial flower, take representative date-marked photographs of the flowering condition if you can.
- Realise that this event may result in a court hearing and it is better to have as much evidence as possible. Write down all facts relating to the incident, the surrounding crops, the circumstances of the spraying, the previous and current condition of the affected colony. Do not rely on later recollections.

## 9.4 The law and pesticide poisoning

### Draft Code of Practice for the safe use of plant products

The then Scottish Executive published a draft revised Code, the official status of which is dependent on a Code of Practice issued under Section 17 of the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985, an Approved Code of Practice issued under Section 16 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 [giving COSHH guidance], an Approved Code of Practice issued under Regulation 21 of the Groundwater Regulations 1998 and guidance on good practice in the safe use of pesticides.

This Code reflects the requirements of the above-mentioned legislation and sets out the best practice to make sure users meet these requirements.

If you have internet access you can download the Draft Code, which runs to a total of 130 pages.

One small section refers to bees and makes it a requirement that beekeepers be given 48 hours notice of spraying. This can only happen if the location of the bees and contact details of beekeepers are known to the spray contractor and/or farmer. **Local Associations are encouraged to set up Spray Liaison schemes, and local beekeepers are encouraged to inform farmers with land near their apiaries of the presence of stocks of bees there.**

## 9.5 Chemicals dangerous to bees

### 9.5.1 General remarks

It is not practical to provide reliable lists of chemicals which are in commercial use at present. These chemicals change from time to time and are marketed under different names by the various chemical firms.

### 9.5.2 Seed treatments — systemic pesticides

A fairly recent development however is that some pesticides for the control of soil and foliar pests are now being applied to crops as a seed treatment.

In some countries beekeepers have reported bee losses that they attribute to the application of these systemic pesticides, although the chemical companies producing these products insist that they are safe.

You should be aware that both winter and spring oil seed rape may have been treated in this way. Therefore if colonies working these crops do not appear to be thriving, and there is no other obvious cause, try to determine if crop protection with a seed treatment was carried out, and if so, obtain details of the product used.