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Pesticide Poisoning

9.1 Contact

The Spray Liaison Officer, whose name is printed each month inside the front cover of *“The Scottish Beekeeper”* and is also given later in section 11.3 of this Manual.

9.2 Spray Liaison

The functions which the Spray Liaison Officer carries out in this area are:–

- to help if requested with the setting up of local Spray Liaison Schemes, and to provide a channel for contact with the Local Spray Liaison Officers;
- to provide technical backup and advice to Local Spray Liaison Officers and to members generally;
- to maintain contact with SGRPID and other official bodies as necessary.

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 possible that poisoning is due to spraying of crops, in full or partial flower, take representative date-marked photographs of the flowering condition if possible
- 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.
- Inform the SBA Spray Liaison Officer.

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 Spray Liaison Schemes

Spray Liaison envisages the maintenance of regular contacts between the pesticide users and beekeepers, so that any problems arising can be mutually understood and amicably solved. Spray Liaison is designed to assure that beekeepers are given adequate warning of intended spraying. However mere spray warning schemes do not provide the essential elements of co-operation and understanding.

At the present time the number of reported cases of pesticide poisoning in Scotland is very low. Nevertheless, the incidents which do occur are aggravating to the beekeepers who are affected. In the absence of Spray Liaison Schemes beekeepers will frequently have no warning of the intended use of pesticides in their area. Furthermore, although pesticide users are under a duty to notify beekeepers, whose colonies may be affected, they can hardly do this if there is no effective source of information and channel of communication.

Each Local Association should have a Spray Liaison Officer. Where no one has been appointed the name of the Local Secretary will be taken as the contact and may be submitted to SGRPID. **In the spring of each year an updated list of these names is submitted, if required, to this Department and can be made available to other bodies on demand, unless such a person notifies the Spray Liaison Officer of an objection to the disclosure of these details.**

Local Spray Liaison Schemes were initiated at meetings called by SGRPID in 1991. However the initiative should not rest solely with SGRPID. Local Associations should take any steps they feel necessary to promote Spray Liaison in their areas. Individual beekeepers should also be advised to let neighbouring farmers and other possible pesticide users know the location of their hives, provided that

this does not conflict with the efforts of the Local Spray Liaison Officers acting in the interest of the Members.

9.6 Chemicals dangerous to bees

9.6.1 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. If information of this sort is required please contact the SBA Spray Liaison Officer, who will provide assistance.

9.6.2 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 and inform the Spray Liaison Officer.