



ASSOCIATION OF VETERINARY AND CROP ASSOCIATIONS OF SOUTH AFRICA  
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## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

# **AVCASA NATIONAL PESTICIDE SAFETY WEEK: HONEY BEE ALERT!!**

**20 October 2008**

**EMBARGO: IMMEDIATE**

### **STARTS**

Honey bees are threatened by a multitude of human induced factors. Food shortage, mite infestations, diseases, predation by other bee species, habitat loss, climate change and pesticide misuse have been identified as factors responsible for the demise of bees worldwide. Without honey bees it is believed that agricultural production and sustainability of natural ecosystems will be seriously compromised as bees fulfill a very important pollination function for most of the flowering plants of the world.

AVCASA (the Association of Veterinary and Crop Associations of South Africa) is inundated with calls about bees that “invade” domestic premises, owl breeding boxes, farm stores and industrial premises. South African pesticide companies have no pesticides registered against bees and will never register any such products as bees are too valuable to be killed despite requests for pesticides to control bees. AVCASA advises the public and farmers to devise other ways of repelling bees such as smoking them out of unwanted places unless they can be tolerated without fear of stinging people that may be allergic to bee stings.

It is always advisable to first determine whether a swarm that moved into premises can be tolerated without having to have the swarm removed. If not, then a local apiarist (bee-keeper) should be contacted to move the swarm to a safe place where the bees can continue with their pollination and honey production functions. Pesticides must not be used to kill bees. Apiarists should only smoke out bees after removing the bulk of the hive. It is advisable to disinfect the site after the swarm has been removed to neutralize any pheromones that may lure other bees to the same site. For more information about this, please contact the Griffon Poison Information Centre on 082-446-8946.

Recent reports on the internet about the danger of two pesticides namely imidacloprid and thiamethoxam for honey bees are misleading. These two products that are used in South Africa and elsewhere are highly toxic to bees when administered directly to bees under laboratory conditions. However, due to their specific application methods as seed dressings and soil drenches the products do not pose a threat to honey bees. These application methods have specifically been designed to prevent imidacloprid and thiamethoxam from becoming available to pollinators. AVCASA strongly advises farmers and gardeners to apply these products strictly according to label instructions to prevent any possible poisoning of bees.

AVCASA appeals to farmers and the gardeners to be very cautious of applying any pesticides incorrectly during the flowering seasons of agricultural crops and ornamental plants. This is the time when bees are most vulnerable to pesticide poisoning. Any requests for advice on responsible pest management in an environment where bees are vulnerable may be directed to the AVCASA head office on 011-805-2000, the Griffon Poison Information Centre on 082-446-8946 or the registration holders of pesticides (contact details to be found on the labels). Integrated pest management is the system by which pests are managed by a variety of methodologies while ensuring that pollinators such as honey bees and predatory insects such as lacewings are protected against pesticide poisoning.

The unprecedented development over the past decade has resulted in a survival dilemma for many wild creatures including honey bees that find themselves evicted from their natural habitats due to the construction of large scale housing and industrial developments. It is expected that bees and other wild creatures will have to find accommodation in urban areas where they were not recorded before. Some people are highly allergic to bee stings but it does not warrant the extermination of bee hives and swarms if they do invade homes or other urban premises. Should any family members be potentially allergic to bee stings it is highly advisable to consult the family's medical practitioner for antihistamines, cortisones and adrenalin preparations to treat bee sting victims immediately before they are evacuated to medical facilities.

Bees are critical for the survival of not only humankind but also of the Planet Earth. It is essential to prevent any possible poisoning of honey bees by ensuring that pesticides are used only as instructed on labels. Although pesticide poisoning has been listed as the least of the concerns for bee survival it remains the opinion of AVCASA that no bee should perish because of pesticide misuse.

For further information please contact:

Mr Tom Mabesa, Executive Director AVCASA at 082-657-5329 or

Dr Gerhard Verdoorn, Griffon Poison Information Centre at 082-446-8946.

**ENDS**