



UNIVERSITY OF
FLORIDA

IFAS EXTENSION

Removing Honey Bee Nests¹

Malcolm T. Sanford²

Removing honey bee nests from cavities (walls of houses, hollow trees) is a time-consuming, labor-intensive practice that should be undertaken by professionals. Continuous honey bee flight activity to and from a hole in a building is an indication of a nest. Many times, this can be confirmed by listening for bees buzzing inside.

An experienced beekeeper usually can remove bees and combs from easily accessible places like hollow trees, but often bees live in building walls or are tucked away where they are impossible to reach.

Simply killing bees in a cavity with an insecticide can have serious consequences:

- Dead bees and dead brood will decay and produce strong odors.
- Stored honey can absorb moisture and ferment or overheat without adult bees to tend it. This results in burst cappings, producing leaking honey from combs which can penetrate ceilings or walls, causing stains, sticky puddles around doors and windows, and softening of drywall.

The quickest way to remove bees from buildings is to kill them and remove all traces of the nest. In

most cases an inner wall or ceiling must be removed, however, calling for the services of a building contractor. It is essential to remove all honeycomb and to plug all holes to be certain there is no way for bees to reenter the area. Any remaining bits of bees wax emit highly attractive odors to swarming bees.

There are a number of ways to kill bees. It is important to exterminate a colony when all bees are on the nest (dusk or dawn). This reduces the number that might be in the field and return to cause problems. Many persons use commercially available wasp and hornet spray for killing the bees. This knocks down the insects quickly and can be used from a distance. Dust formulations of labelled pesticides may also be pumped onto an enclosed nest. There is more and more evidence that soapy water is also a very good material to use that is inexpensive and relatively environmentally benign. How the bees are killed will depend on the particular situation.

A slower method of honey bee removal which kills fewer of the insects can be used in certain situations. It is based on the principle that bees which leave a building can be prevented from reentering. However, the bees will cluster in a large mass around

1. This document is ENY132, one of a series of the Entomology and Nematology Department, Florida Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida. Original publication date November, 1992. Reviewed May, 2003. Visit the EDIS Web Site at <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu>.

2. Professor, Department of Entomology and Nematology, Cooperative Extension Service, Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences, University of Florida, Gainesville.

their previous exit where they are encouraged to enter another colony. Experienced beekeepers do the job best; they are used to bees flying around and to being stung occasionally. The following steps are recommended:

1. From a beekeeper, obtain a one-story hive containing one frame of unsealed brood covered with bees, one frame of honey, and adequate frames of drawn comb or foundation to fill the hive.
2. Fold a piece of window screen to make a cone wide enough at the bottom to completely cover the bees' entrance to the building. This cone is then reduced to about 3/8 inch in diameter. Bend the cone's smaller opening upward.
3. Plug all other holes where bees may enter the building. This is the key to any removal process. All other bee exits must be sealed!
4. Protect yourself with at least a bee veil and long sleeves (bee gloves are optional) and use a smoker to confuse the bees. Fasten the large end of the screen cone tightly over the entrance.
5. Position the one-story hive as near the cone entrance as possible. It can be positioned on brackets nailed to the building. Place the frames with brood and honey in the center of the hive; place frames of drawn comb or foundation at the sides. The hive entrance should be reduced to about a 1-inch opening to protect the colony from being robbed by stronger colonies that may be in the area. Bees emerging from the screen cone will not be able to find their way back into the building. Instead, they enter the hive. As bees leave the building and move into the hive, the old colony will grow weak.
6. About 4 weeks later, remove the cone. Bees from the new hive will now be able to enter the building (their previous nest) and transfer the honey to the new hive. The queen in the building is lost along with a few other bees and perhaps some brood. However, with all the honey removed, there is little possibility of major odor or honey leakage problems. After the bees have moved completely and the honey has been

transferred, close all hoses and cracks to prevent bees from reentering.

The following materials will usually be needed to remove honey bee colonies from buildings.

Bee working supplies

Veil
 Bee suit
 Gloves
 Hive tool
 Queen cage
 Smoker
 Smoker fuel
 Matches
 Hive
 Hive entrance sealer (1/8" hardware cloth cut to size)
 About four empty frames, the rest with foundation
 Cutting/framing tray
 Knife
 Wire and/or string
 Pliers
 Buckets with covers for honey comb and scrap comb
 Burlap bags
 Paint brush
 Dust pan
 Water for drinking and cleanup

Tools for structural work

Ladder(s)

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Hammer and nails

Crow bar

Aluminum and cutters

Saw (skill + cord, hand, chain + fuel)

Tin foil for sealing holes

Scaffold material for hive suspension

Wire funnel

Staple gun