

## ILLEGAL USE OF SODIUM CYANIDE

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and state departments of agriculture have recently been alerted that some beekeepers have been using **sodium cyanide compound** to control pests in their honey bee colonies/hives. Specifically, apiarists have been purchasing and using a **sodium cyanide compound** as a fumigant in beehives to destroy or mitigate wax moths<sup>1</sup> including the caterpillar and larvae, as well as to cull out weaker hives. These practices are illegal and have the potential for serious harm to human health and the environment.

All pesticides distributed in the United States must be registered by the EPA. The Federal pesticide law [the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA)] defines “pesticide” to include any substance intended for controlling, mitigating or destroying pests. A substance is a pesticide and requires registration as such if the person distributing the substance (1) makes claims, either expressed or implied, that the substance can be used as a pesticide or (2) distributes the substance with the knowledge that the substance will be used to control pests. **Any individual selling or distributing sodium cyanide compound for mitigating any pest, including the wax moth, caterpillar and larvae, or any other pest for use in bee hives or colonies is selling and distributing an unregistered pesticide and subject to penalties of up to \$6,500 per violation under FIFRA.**

**Currently, there are no sodium cyanide or similar cyanide compound products registered by the EPA for pest control in honey bee colonies/hives.** Also, there are no established residue tolerances for any cyanide compound in honey or beeswax. Honey analyzed and found to contain any cyanide compound residue would be considered adulterated under the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act, and could be seized. The seizure of honey due to adulteration with a highly toxic chemical would be detrimental to the entire apiary industry.

Further, use of **sodium cyanide** in an apiary setting can be extremely dangerous. The compound is highly toxic to humans and other warm-blooded animals, and it is a Toxicity Category I compound - EPA’s highest toxicity level for pesticides. This rating indicates the greatest degree of acute toxicity for oral, dermal, and inhalation effects. It is highly corrosive to the skin and eyes. Cyanide can be absorbed through the skin and its vapor is absorbed extremely rapidly via the respiratory tract.

**Beekeepers who are currently in possession of the highly toxic, unregistered sodium cyanide compound or related products should contact their state agricultural agency for instructions on proper storage and disposal of the product. The state agricultural agency can also provide information on registered pesticides, such as paradichlorobenzene and aluminum phosphide products, that are legal to use to mitigate pests in honey bee colonies/hives.**

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<sup>1</sup>Wax moth includes both the Greater Wax Moth, *Galleria mellonella*, and the Lesser Wax Moth, *Achroia grissella*, both of which are sometimes referred to as the wax wing moth.