



DAFM Notice – Lead contamination of honey

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine wishes to advise beekeepers that over recent years it has identified a number of incidences of elevated lead in Irish honey. In total four Irish beekeepers in four different geographical regions have been affected. In all cases affected honey had to be destroyed due to the food safety risk arising from consumption of honey with elevated lead.

Following investigations into the probable sources of the lead contamination the Department would like to notify all beekeepers of four simple steps they can take to minimise the risk of lead contaminating their honey:

1. Hives should not be located in areas associated with lead mining (past or present) or in close proximity to recycling centres, vehicle dismantlers or scrap yards. Beekeepers should be conscious that bees forage over a wide radius from the hive.
2. Honey should not be in contact with any metal other than stainless steel. Extractors and storage containers should be constructed from food grade plastic or stainless steel. If milk churns/galvanised steel containers are used to store honey they must have a smooth internal surface which is then lined with a food grade plastic bag to prevent the honey coming in contact with the metal. Beekeepers should verify with their suppliers that any material in contact with honey is suitable for use with honey including when heating honey (if appropriate).
3. Feed for bees (syrup) should only be prepared using drinking (potable) water. Feed should be prepared and stored in food grade plastic or stainless steel containers.
4. Pre-treated timber must not be used to construct brood chambers, supers or frames. Internal hive parts should never be treated with timber preservative. If treating timber, ensure the treatment is only applied to the outside of the brood chamber/super after construction and allow time for the preservative to dry prior to use.

To minimise their loss in the event of a problem being identified with their honey, large scale beekeepers should have a system that will link Apiary/Apiaries of production, to honey bucket/buckets to Lot Numbers on jars and then to outlet for honey.

Anyone with queries or concerns regarding lead contamination in honey should contact:
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Backweston, Celbridge, Co. Kildare.
Phone: 01 5058755*