



What is Oxalic Acid

Oxalic acid is an industrial chemical generally available and used for removing rust from metal and deep cleaning timber and other materials.

Oxalic acid is not currently registered or permitted for use in honey bee hives by the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority (APVMA).

Use of the chemical oxalic acid for treatment of pest and disease of bees is not registered or permitted by the APVMA and is a breach of the *Stock Medicines Act 1989*.

Unless a formal exemption or a permit is granted by the APVMA, it is an offence under the Agvet Code and monetary penalties apply to breaches of the Code.

Safety

Risks to safety of humans and the environment exist for all of the known delivery methods for Oxalic acid overseas.

The most common method of use (fogging) presents the highest risk to the operator. Safety issues including skin yellowing, blistering, respiratory issues and eye irritation have all been document overseas where Oxalic acid is widely used.

The preparation of the Oxalic acid towel mix and soaking is also prohibited and dangerous.



*Examples from overseas of fogging bee hives.
Note: this is illegal in Australia*

The use of Oxalic acid poses the following serious human health risks:

- Harmful if swallowed or inhaled (fogging)
- Harmful in contact with skin causes skin yellowing and blistering
- Causes severe skin burns and eye damage which can be permanent
- Corrosive to the respiratory tract when inhaled
- May cause damage to kidneys through prolonged or repeated exposure



Workplace

The risk for beekeepers is that if staff or workers are instructed to use this product and are injured the business owner risks litigation by the worker and the authorities.

It is a requirement of Australian workplace safety laws that employers and employees are required to understand their legislative obligations to prevent, eliminate or minimise the risk to their staff, themselves, other people at the workplace and the environment. Significant penalties exist for failure to take reasonable steps to manage risks to safety in the workplace should a person or the environment come to harm.

If you provide chemical use advice, you have a duty to ensure that the information you provide is accurate and reliable. If the advice you provide is off-label (different to the label directions), you can be held responsible for any adverse consequences resulting from the user following this advice.

Chemical users should always refer to the chemical product label that is current and approved by the APVMA. Off-label use of chemicals is not recommended and is not included within a manufacturer's warranty.

Using Oxalic acid for the treatment of pests in honey bee colonies is considered off-label use and in Australia it is against the law.

All aspects of off-label use are the user's responsibility, including:

- occupational health and safety
- environmental safeguards
- welfare of livestock
- residue control

AHBIC reminds all beekeepers to conduct safe and responsible beekeeping activities.

APVMA permits

Currently in Australia there are APVMA permits held by NSW Department of Primary Industries for emergency use of Bayvarol for Varroa Response. These chemical products are restricted to the conditions listed within the permit.

Oxalic acid is unlikely to be registered for use in bee hives in Australia until one of the chemical companies invest the significant amount of money required to conduct all the safety and efficacy trials required. Due to the disastrous health and safety issues demonstrated overseas the APVMA require the full registration process to be completed.

VM Response and Non-Compliance

Currently the Emergency Order states "A person must not apply a chemical to a hive for the purpose of controlling or suppressing Varroa mite in that hive unless:

- (a) directed by an authorised officer
- (b) otherwise permitted by this emergency order"

Testing for residues of suspected Oxalic acid use in honey bee hives and subsequent positive findings, may result in prosecution if found to contravene an Emergency Order.

