



# The Smoker

## Practical Fact Sheet

# 3

**Please note:** This series of MBKA Fact Sheets are intended to accompany practical sessions and demonstrations at members' apiaries during the season.

Of course, there is no "right way" to keep bees and most objectives can be achieved in several different ways.

The advice presented in these notes is therefore selective, representing the method or methods used commonly and generally accepted as "best practice".

They should be regarded as guidance notes. It is expected that revisions will be frequent in the early phase of their production!

This fact-sheet covers suitable fuels, the lighting and use of the beekeepers' smoker

There are almost as many suitable fuels for a smoker as there are beekeepers, most experienced folk have settled on a particular favourite. Essentially, any organic material that is dry, not too dense, easily obtained and pleasant to handle should do the trick. Common examples are

- corrugated paper
- cotton waste, fibreboard, hessian sacking
- garden shreds of twigs and leaves (pass twice through shredder)
- rotten wood (the crumbly, soft stage)
- prunings, natural drop from evergreens, etc, etc,

Corrugated paper should be tightly rolled until it just fits the barrel of the smoker (loosely rolled paper burns very quickly) Remember that some packaging is treated with fire-retardant; test some first! Light the bottom of the roll with a match or blowlamp being careful not to have your hand over the top of the roll - the flames run up the centre and can make the top very hot. Once well lit, put in the smoker and use the bellows to make sure that it is established.

The lighting technique for practically all other fuels is similar - light a small sheet of newspaper, push that down onto the smoker grate and add a SMALL amount of the chosen fuel, working the bellows continuously. Once that is burning really well, add another small amount of fuel and use the bellows to get that fire well established. Once that is burning freely, add the rest of the fuel, puff the bellows until dense smoke is produced and then put to one side to smoulder.

The secret is to start small - get the fire really well established before fuelling up.

In use, keep an occasional eye on the smoker, a couple of puffs should result in cool smoke. If it is running away, it's possibly running low on fuel - check. If it's just hot, lay it on its side for a short while (not too long, it could go out). A loose layer of green grass can be used to cool the smoke.

Although inexperienced beekeepers should always have a smoker ready for use, that does not mean to say you have to use it excessively. Just a few puffs before you open a hive and be prepared as you raise the crown board but, in general, use as little smoke as is possible, compatible with maintaining the bees in a calm state and gently shepherding them away from the area where you are working.

Maintenance : keep reasonably clean, externally and internally. Avoid accumulation of ash below the grate. Bellows tend to become sticky with propolis, remove with strong washing soda solution.

PS. large smokers are easier to light, stay alight better and of course, keep going longer!