

All abuzz on Prospect Hill

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BEVERLY, MASS. - Well we're all abuzz up here on Prospect Hill. Literally. You see a colony of yellow jackets has taken up residence inside the black box suspended on the wires, which hang off the telephone pole outside our house.

As a child, there are a few electrical facts you learn and never forget. Don't stick your finger in the socket; don't drop the hairdryer in the bathtub; don't pull your bread out of the toaster with a knife; and never, ever go near the wires coming out of the telephone pole. Another thing you intuitively grasp as a child is: Don't go near a nest of yellow jackets.

And yet here on the hill we have not just wires, and not just wasps, but also both intermingling in a nasty, electro-jacket cocktail. Surely, I reasoned, the power company would be concerned.

They weren't.

They suggested I call the cable company, who was most likely the true owner of the box.

"Hi, there," I began with the cable customer service rep, "I'm calling to report a yellow jacket nest in the cable box." The lady paused and replied, "There is a wire down outside your house?" "Nooooo. No wires out of place. But rather," I enunciated, "A. Yellow. Jacket. Nest. In. The. Cable. Box."

"HMMMMM," she paused. "I'm not sure we handle that sort of request." That was not what I had hoped to hear.

"But surely you don't want normal citizens climbing up ladders among the wires and spraying insecticide into your box," I countered.

The lady hummed some more and then said, "I suppose I could create a special ticket."

"Wonderful." I replied. "That sounds like just the thing."

We parted on a happy note.

And then a week passed, and the colony grew.

At one point, so many yellow jackets were swarming the box that they had to crawl over top of each other in a waspy knot. This knot then fell to the ground in a tangle of wings, legs and, one can only assume, stingers. Dropping bee bombs: Every mother's dream for her front sidewalk.

I marched into the house and called the cable company again.

"I think maybe my special ticket has been lost in the shuffle," I stated. "Yes, I can confirm that for you," said the service rep. "Your ticket has, in fact, been lost in the shuffle."

Well. I was taken aback; no customer service rep had ever admitted that to me. This guy was a renegade. He was flying off the script. I liked him.

"What do I do?" I conspired with him.

"I'll tell you what," he said in a way that made me believe he'd thrown all protocol right out the window. "I'm going to give you the direct phone number for your local dispatcher. No voice mail prompts, just a direct line."

Armed with my direct number, I contacted the local dispatcher and, in another round of shockingly prompt and amiable service, he drove out at 7 a.m. the next

day. But a rapid response will only get you so far. He looked at the box and said, "That's not ours. That's the phone company's."

Naturally.

Then it got tricky. Our phone service is with a low-cost company. Their costs are low because they simply provide our service, not the equipment. Our physical phone lines, and therefore the box in question, are owned by a separate, larger, company. Probably the same, larger company that owns your phone lines. And the nest? The nest-in-the-box was the no man's land between the two.

"Let me get this straight," I said to something like the 17th person I had been transferred to at the larger phone company. "You admit this box belongs to you?"

The rep confirmed this.

"But because I don't have service with you, nor do any of my neighbors, you will not remove the yellow jackets?" The rep confirmed this as well. "As long as there is not a problem with the actual phone lines, since you don't have an account with us," she sighed in a suggestive, admonishing way, "we can't help you."

In a final push to find an agency that might be equipped to both safely climb up among the power lines, and have a bit of wasp-removal know how, I called City Hall. They directed me to Animal Control. Animal Control told me that this was really more of a health concern and transferred me to the Beverly Board of Health. They sounded confused; by that point so was I.

Defeated at every turn, the yellow jackets remain our problem and no one's responsibility.

Buzz buzz.

Note: Esther Baird is a Beverly writer. Her column appears regularly in the Citizen.

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