

1

Protecting Pollinators from Neonicotinoid Pesticides: An Overview of the Proposed Save Oregon's Pollinators Bill



Photo by Catia Juliana

Around the country and worldwide, bee poisoning incidents point to the grave threat that neonicotinoid insecticides pose. In Europe, a temporary ban was placed on three neonicotinoids. In Canada, new restrictions are being considered for seeds treated with these chemicals. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency recently initiated a review of neonicotinoid pesticides, including a specific evaluation of the risks to bees.

Here in Oregon, in response to the local bee-kills which resulted in the loss of approximately 55,000 bees, the Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) stopped the use of two neonicotinoid pesticides - dinotefuran and imidacloprid - on Linden (*Tilia*) trees.

2

The Oregon Solution

Currently, anyone can buy and use the same pesticides linked to these bee kills without receiving training. Yet, many of the products, including those intended for home gardeners, provide little or no information about the risks to bees. Further adding to the danger, consumers can apply these pesticides in backyard gardens in much larger amounts than agriculture is allowed to use.

To help prevent future harm to bees and other pollinators from these insecticides, Oregon Representative Jeff Reardon (D-Happy Valley and E. Portland) is proposing a bill that creates a short-term solution. The bill, "Save Oregon's Pollinators," aims to better regulate the use of neonicotinoid products used in and around pollinator habitat. More specifically, the bill...

- Allows only licensed applicators to apply products that contain the two chemicals linked with the bee kills, as well as two other related compounds. Products that contain dinotefuran, imidacloprid, clothianidin, and thiamethoxam would be removed from sale to the general public.
- Requires licensed pesticide applicators to receive training about how to protect pollinators from these chemicals.
- Will be withdrawn January 2, 2021 or possibly sooner if the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency finalizes the review of these pesticides.

This bill simply helps reduce unreasonable harm to bees and other pollinators from targeted products that contain long-lasting, highly toxic neonicotinoid insecticides.

Backyard gardeners would still have many other options available to control harmful or unwanted insect pests. For example, Oregon has more than 230 products registered to control lace bugs, and over 400 products for aphid control in homes or gardens. These include many less-toxic options.

Oregon is recognized across the country as offering high quality resources for sustainable pest management. Oregon State University Extension Service, as well as local government entities such as Metro offer excellent resources to help gardeners find safe alternatives to pesticides.



3

Background: Oregon's Pollinators Need Protection from Toxic Insecticides

Pollinators are essential for Oregon's vibrant agricultural sector, supporting over \$600 million of insect-pollinated crops grown by Oregon farmers each year. Their crops include small fruits, such as blueberries, marionberries, loganberries and black raspberries, tree fruits such as apples, pears and cherries, as well as watermelon and seed for crimson clover, red clover, and alfalfa. All of this farm production depends heavily on the pollination services of both European honey bees and native pollinators such as bumble bees.

These bees also ensure that Oregon gardeners can produce fruit, vegetables and flowers. Furthermore, pollinators play a central role in maintaining a healthy environment. Pollinators help 85% of plants to reproduce and they are responsible for the abundant nuts, seeds, and fruit that feed wildlife, from birds to bears.

In Oregon, four separate insecticide applications in the summer of 2013 caused the death of approximately 55,000 bumble bees from more than 300 colonies. An investigation by the Oregon Department of Agriculture implicated dinotefuran in two of the kills and a closely related pesticide, imidacloprid, in the other two. These insecticides, along with clothianidin and thiamethoxam, are neonicotinoids, the most widely used group of insecticides in the world. They are highly toxic to honey bees, as well as many native pollinators, including bumble bees.

Compounding the risk, these four neonicotinoid insecticides are particularly long-lasting. They can persist in plants up to six years after a single application. They have been found in soil up to two years after an application. That means they can continue to harm bees long after their initial use.

Support

The "Save Oregon's Pollinators" bill is supported by: *Beyond Toxics*, *Oregon League of Conservation Voters*, the *Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides*, and the *Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation*.

Learn more about the risks from neonicotinoid use and how to protect pollinators in your own yard:

<http://www.xerces.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/NeonicsInYourGarden.pdf>

<http://www.xerces.org/neonicotinoids-and-bees/>

<http://www.xerces.org/beyond-the-birds-and-the-bees/>