

As EPA Restricts Some Pesticide Use, Defenders of Bees Call for More Action

New action to protect pollinators ignores harmful chemicals already on market, groups say

by Nadia Prupis, staff writer

The Environmental Protection Agency on Thursday announced restrictions on new or expanded uses of harmful neonicotinoid pesticides that may pose risks to honey bees and other pollinators, but environmental groups say the moratorium—while welcome—does not go far enough.

A day after Portland, Oregon's city commission suspended the use of pesticides on its property to protect honey bees, the EPA told companies using neonicotinoids that the agency will halt granting permits for those pesticides until it can assess the threats they pose to pollinators. The widespread use of certain herbicides and pesticides has come under increased scrutiny in recent years after a noted decline in bee populations, which play a crucial part in food production.

But a number of national and state-based environmental groups have called on the EPA to expand its protection of pollinators to include a ban on products already on the market.

“It’s welcome news that EPA is finally beginning to address the threat that neonics pose to the nation’s bees and other pollinators, but given the threats to the nation’s food and farm-



The EPA’s new effort to protect bees does not go far enough, say environmental groups. (Photo: Matthew T. Rader/flickr/cc)

ing system, more is needed,” Kristin Schafer, policy director at Pesticide Action Network North America, said in a press release. “Numerous bee-harming neonics and their cousin products are already on the market, and seed coatings in particular have led to a dramatic surge in use over the last few years. EPA should go further to place a moratorium on existing products.”

As the Center for Biological Diversity points out, neonicotinoids are linked to the chronic and acute decline of bees, birds, earthworms, butterflies, and other crucial pollinators and

wildlife, particularly through disease and malnutrition. They are especially dangerous because they are slow to break down, which leads to an environmental build-up of pesticides, causing long-term danger to critical ecosystems, the center says.

In its announcement, the EPA said it “believes that until the data on pollinator health have been received and appropriate risk assessments completed, it is unlikely to be in a position to determine that such uses would avoid ‘unreasonable adverse effects on the environment.’”

However, without extending its regulations to include neonicotinoids already being sold, the EPA is undermining its own efforts to protect pollinators, activists say.

“EPA’s announcement is disingenuous,” said Jeff Anderson, a beekeeper and owner of California Minnesota Honey Farms. “In the last year, EPA has approved registration for two new neonics, and expanded uses of these pesticides to additional blooming crops—also increasing residue tolerances to accommodate these new uses. Allowing increased toxic exposure to my bees and then announcing a moratorium? Very disingenuous.”