



Last Chance to Comment on Pesticides and Bee Health

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SEATTLE – Today is the final day for the public to comment on an updated assessment of four pesticides that environmental and food-safety groups worry are killing off bees.

Hundreds of thousands of public comments are being delivered to EPA headquarters in Washington, D.C., today by Friends of the Earth, the Center for Biological Diversity, Earthjustice and others. They're urging the agency to ban pesticides known as neonicotinoids.

Attorney Janette Brimmer with Earthjustice says there isn't enough scrutiny from the EPA of these types of pesticides.

"Our pesticide registration system is, generally, a broken system," she says. "I mean, it is so manufacturer-driven, and this is just kind of the latest example of it. And while it can work, it needs an EPA that is engaged, that cares about working."

Bee populations have been in steady decline for years. According to an annual nationwide study from the Bee Informed Partnership, U.S. beekeepers lost a third of their colonies from last spring to this spring.



Bees are important pollinators for plants and flowers, but in the past year, populations nationwide have dropped by one-third. (Andreas/Flickr)

The EPA's new risk assessment says the pesticides do not pose a significant risk to bee colonies.

However, a study published in Science magazine on bees in Europe concluded that bees have a hard time establishing colonies the year after exposure to neonicotinoids.

Brimmer says with fewer pollinators to help the crops, farms have to rely on commercial beekeepers. But there's a problem there too.

"Basically, since neonicotinoids came on the market, even contract pollinators - in other words, commercial beekeepers - are having a hard time supplying contracts, getting crops

pollinated,” she explains. “The price is going up for those crops. So, there’s a ripple effect.”

Big-box stores like Home Depot, Lowes, Walmart and nearly a hundred other retailers are phasing out plants treated with neonicotinoids because of their effect on bees.