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Scientists, Beekeepers Visit Annapolis to Support Labeling and Consumer Restrictions on Bee-Killing Pesticides  

Scientists Say Evidence of Harm Warrants Attention Now

(Annapolis, MD) – Scientists and beekeepers joined farmers and public health, food and environmental advocates to visit legislators and testify before the Maryland House of Delegates Environment and Transportation committee in favor of the Pollinator Protection Act (Senate Bill 163/House Bill 605) this afternoon.

The Act would restrict consumer use of neonicotinoid (aka “neonics”) pesticides so they would be available for sale only to certified applicators, farmers or veterinarians. It would also require that any plants, seeds or nursery stock treated with neonics include an informational label.

The bill is sponsored by Senator Nathan-Pulliam (District 44) and Delegate Healey (District 22) and has bipartisan support. It was heard in the Senate Education, Health and Environmental Affairs committee on February 17th.

“Neonics negatively impact beneficial insects, such as bee, and the evidence is significant to warrant our attention now,” said Dr. April Boulton, Ph.D., Asst. Professor of Biology at Hood College.

“Reducing these powerful pesticides would help reduce hazards to aquatic organisms in the Chesapeake Bay, help support bird populations that rely on insects as food sources and help ensure food security that relies on bee pollination,” said Dr. Boulton. “Most importantly, it would help preserve core species from both plant and animal kingdoms in Maryland’s ecosystem.”

Beekeepers have reported average hive losses of 30 percent or higher each year since 2006; in 2012, Maryland beekeepers lost nearly 50 percent of their hives.

A meta-analysis of 1,121 peer-reviewed studies conducted by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) confirmed that neonics “are a key factor in the decline of bees.” The report called for immediate regulatory action on neonicotinoids. Read a summary of scientific research showing that neonics harm bees and other pollinators here.
“At this alarming rate of honey bee losses, our food supply will simply not be sustainable,” said Roger Williams, beekeeper and President of the Central Maryland Beekeepers Association. “By taking responsible steps, such as the Pollinator Protection Act, we can protect our bees and food supply – and our beekeepers -- from extinction.”

In addition to killing bees outright, research shows that even low levels of these toxic pesticides impair bees' ability to learn, find their way back to the hive, collect food, produce new queens, and mount an effective immune response. Research also shows neonics can harm other wildlife, including birds and butterflies, and they are linked to death of molting blue crabs.

Neonics also pose a risk to human health. The European Food Safety Authority has concluded that some neonicotinoids may affect the developing human nervous system by affecting functions such as learning and memory.

Honey bees and other pollinators are responsible for one out of every three bites of food we eat. Bees pollinate 71 of the 100 crops that make up 90 percent of the world's food supply. Many fruits and vegetables, including apples, blueberries, strawberries, carrots and broccoli, as well as almonds and coffee, rely on bees.

Neonics are the fastest growing and most heavily used class of insecticides. More than half of “bee-friendly” plants purchased at Home Depot, Walmart and Lowes stores in 18 cities across the United States and Canada, including in Maryland, had levels of neonicotinoids at sufficient levels to kill bees outright, according to a 2014 Friends of the Earth study.

There is strong public support for the legislation. In a recent OpinionWorks poll of 562 randomly selected Maryland registered voters, 81 percent of voters supported the proposal to label nursery plants and 78 percent of Maryland voters favored restricting consumer use of this type of pesticides.

For more information, read a fact sheet about the Pollinator Protection Act, a Frequently Asked Questions document and “Bees in Trouble” fact sheet from Friends of the Earth here.

Advocates are tweeting about the bill at #beesafe

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The Smart on Pesticides Maryland coalition works to protect Marylanders and the natural systems we depend upon from the toxic impacts of pesticides. The coalition includes more than 55 organizations, and institutions representing communities, businesses, health care providers, farmers, environmentalists, Waterkeepers, interfaith congregants as well as environmental justice, public health and wildlife advocates.