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Maryland Becomes First State in Country to Restrict Bee-Killing Pesticides
Bill would restrict consumer use of neonicotinoid pesticides, which harm bees and other pollinators

Annapolis, MD (April 7, 2016) – Maryland became the first state in the country to restrict all consumer use of neonicotinoid pesticides today, with a final and bi-partisan vote of 99 - 38 in the House of Delegates on the Pollinator Protection Act (SB 198/HB 211), sponsored by Delegate Healey (District 22) and Senator Nathan-Pulliam (District 44). The Senate voted 34-12 in favor of the final bill on Wednesday, and it now goes to Governor Hogan for his signature.

“Maryland has proven itself a leader once again – taking a major step toward protecting our pollinators, food supply, blue crabs and public health,” said Ruth Berlin, Executive Director of the Maryland Pesticide Education Network. “This historic bill will not only help Maryland, but we hope it also motivates other states – and the federal government – to reduce the use of toxic neonic pesticides. Our future food supply is at stake.”

Numerous studies confirm that neonicotinoids contribute to bee mortality, as well as to declines in other native pollinators, including birds and butterflies. Last year, Maryland beekeepers lost a staggering 61 percent of their hives – about twice the national average and far more than in a typical year. Since 2006, beekeepers have lost an average of 30 percent of their hives.

Advocates say limiting consumer use is significant because neonics are one of the most widely used class of insecticides, consumers often overuse them and safer alternative are available.

“Anybody who cares about our local food supply should be cheering the passage of this bill along with me,” said Bonnie Raindrop, the Legislative Committee Chair of the Central Maryland Beekeepers Association. “It’s high time we got these harmful products off store shelves and out of the hands of consumers.”

Although Maryland is the first state to pass a bill banning all consumer use of neonics, other states have considered or are currently considering similar legislation. Bills to restrict neonics were introduced during the 2015-2016 legislative sessions in Alaska, California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Maine, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Virginia and Vermont.

The federal Environmental Protection Agency is currently conducting a neonicotinoids risk assessment, due to be completed in 2017. Their preliminary findings concluded that one type of neonic (imidacloprid) “potentially poses risk to hives when the pesticide comes in contact with certain crops that attract pollinators.”
Neonics are pervasive in the environment, and studies show they can also harm aquatic life and public health. A recent U.S. Geological Survey study found 59 percent of all streams sampled nationwide had detectable levels of neonic contamination – including sampling from the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

The Pollinator Protection Act originally included a mandate that any plants, seeds or nursery stock treated with neonics include an informational label or signage in close proximity. This provision was removed from the final version of the bill. Advocates continue to say that the public has a right to know when plants, seeds and nursery stock have been treated with neonics, and they encourage retail outlets to make this information available.

Advocates credit this year’s bill passage to strong support from legislative leaders, particularly Senator Joan Carter Conway, Chair of the Education, Health and Environment Committee; Delegate Kumar Barve, Chair of the Environment and Transportation Committee; and bill sponsors Senator Nathan-Pulliam and Delegate Healey. Advocates also thank the many beekeepers, farmers, public health and environmental advocates and constituents who sent thousands of letters and emails to their legislators, made phone calls and visited offices.

The last time Maryland passed legislation regulating pesticides use was in 1998 with the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) in Schools Law, which was expanded to include IPM on school grounds in 1999.

View a fact sheet for more information on the Pollinator Protection Act.

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The Smart on Pesticides Maryland coalition, spearheaded by the Maryland Pesticide Education Network, works to protect Marylanders and the natural systems we depend upon from the toxic impacts of pesticides. The coalition includes more than 75 organizations, and institutions representing communities, businesses, health care providers, farmers, environmentalists, Waterkeepers, interfaith congregants as well as environmental justice, public health and wildlife advocates.