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MAY/JUNE 2014 ALTERNATIVE HEALTH

Big Win for Oregon Bees

by John Jordan-Cascade

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What's buzzing on the grapevine? This past February, Oregon passed the nation's first statewide legislation that will better protect bees.

The Save Oregon's Pollinators Act is an important first step toward a solution to reduce unreasonable harm to bees and other pollinators from targeted products that contain long-lasting, highly toxic neonicotinoid insecticides.

Pollinators are essential for Oregon's vibrant agricultural sector, supporting over \$600 million of insect-pollinated crops grown by Oregon farmers each year, including blueberries, marionberries, loganberries as well as apple and pear trees. 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.

Bees also play a central role in maintaining a healthy environment. Pollinators help 85 percent of plants to reproduce and they are responsible for the abundant nuts, seeds and fruit that feed Oregon's wildlife, from birds to bears to squirrels.

Bee Kills Spur Action

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 others. 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, and have been found in soil up to two years after an application. This means they can continue to harm bees long after their initial use.

In February, Eugene became the first city in the nation to ban the use of neonicotinoids on all city property. The city's goal is to create pesticide-free parks in every neighborhood, providing toxic-free play areas for children.

Learn more about the threat to bees from neonicotinoids and how to cultivate more bee-friendly gardens at www.saveoregonbees.org.

— John Jordan-Cascade, communications manager at Beyond Toxics, www.beyondtoxics.org



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