

# Bayer Names Different Culprit In Mass Bee Die-offs

Posted by Toi Williams on Jan 26th, 2014 // No Comments

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The European Union has linked a type of pesticide that Bayer produces to the large-scale die-offs of honeybee populations in Western Europe and North America. The pesticides, known as neonicotinoids, were banned in Europe this year for use on many of the flowering crops that attract honeybees. Bayer and two of its competitors that also produce the pesticides have disagreed with the ban and are fighting to overturn it in the European courts. The other two companies are Syngenta and BASF.

Gillian Mansfield, an official at the company's Bayer CropScience division said, "Bayer is strictly committed to bee health." The company has created a Bee Care Center on its campus in Germany in a cozy two-story building decorated in whimsical yellow bee sculptures and bee fun facts written in English. Bayer will open another Bee Care Center in Raleigh, N.C. next year.

At the company's Bee Care Center, looming next to a bee sculpture is a sculpture of a parasite known as a varroa mite, Bayer's culprit in the mysterious mass deaths of bees. The varroa, sometimes called the vampire mite, resembles a gargantuan cooked crab

with spiky hair. Bayer has funded research that blames mites for the bee die-off and has combined resources from the Bayer CropScience and Bayer Animal Health divisions to further study the mite menace.

In the United States, the Environmental Protection Agency has stated that its “scientific conclusions are similar to those expressed” by European regulators, but the agency does not have sufficient information to institute its own ban. In 2010, a leaked internal E.P.A. document regarding one of the pesticides, Bayer’s clothianidin, said that there was a “major risk concern” of its high toxicity “to nontarget insects (that is, honey bees).” The agency is being pressed for a ban by a coalition of beekeepers and environmental groups.

Advocacy group Corporate Europe Observatory has dubbed all three companies that produce the pesticides “the bee killers.” Hans Muilerman, a chemicals expert at environmental group Pesticide Action Network Europe, says that Bayer is doing “almost anything that helps their products remaining on the market. Massive lobbying, hiring P.R. firms to frame and spin, inviting commissioners to show their plants and their sustainability.” He continued, “Since they learned people care about bees, they are happy to start the type of actions you mention, ‘bee care centers’ and such.”