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Environmental Groups Head to Court Over Pollinator-Killing Pesticides

Neonicotinoid pesticides have been linked to mass bee die-offs and declining pollinator populations.

TORONTO - Environmental groups are headed to court in a bid to protect pollinators from a harmful class of pesticides.

The David Suzuki Foundation, Friends of the Earth Canada, Ontario Nature and the Wilderness Committee have been tracking the scientific evidence linking neonicotinoid pesticides and pollinator deaths. Now, they say it's time for Canada to stop ignoring the risks.

Ecojustice lawyers representing the groups argue that a number of pesticides containing two neonicotinoid active ingredients (Clothianidin and Thiamethoxam) are unlawfully registered in Canada.

They allege that the Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) failed to live up to its legal responsibilities as a regulator. Specifically, the Agency failed to ensure for more than a decade that it had the scientific information necessary to determine the pesticides' environmental risks, in particular risks to pollinators. The federal *Pest Control Products Act* requires the PMRA have "reasonable certainty" that a pesticide will cause no harm to the environment before registering it.

They also point to a number of Thiamethoxam-based pesticides that have been registered for years in Canada without ever being subject to public consultation required by the Act.

The environmental groups are asking the court to declare the registrations of these Clothianidin and Thiamethoxam-based pesticides invalid. Only validly registered pesticides can be used in Canada.

Ecojustice lawyer, Charles Hatt, said: "The PMRA has taken a see-no-evil, hear-no-evil, speak-no-evil approach by repeatedly registering these

neonicotinoid pesticides without important scientific information on their risks to pollinators.”

Anne Bell, Director of Conservation and Education at Ontario Nature, said: “Pollinators are key players in our ecosystems, and their declines are extremely concerning. A stunning variety of plants — including fruits, vegetables, nuts, and 90 per cent of flowering plants — need pollinators to reproduce and thrive.”

Gwen Barlee, National Policy Director at the Wilderness Committee, said: “Pollinator populations are plummeting and the science tells us that neonicotinoids play a big role in that decline. So why is the PMRA continuing to allow their use and sale? We need to get these bee-killing pesticides out of Canadian agriculture.”

Beatrice Olivastri, Chief Executive Officer at Friends of the Earth, said: “Decision-makers in the European Union, France, and even Ontario have already opted to heavily restrict the use of neonicotinoids. It’s time for Canada to join this push to protect pollinators.”

Dr. Faisal Moola, PhD, Director General of Ontario and Northern Canada at the David Suzuki Foundation, said: “The Province of Ontario recently brought in strong restrictions on the use of dangerous neonicotinoid pesticides in agriculture. We're hoping that our court case will compel the federal government to take similar action in response to widespread public concern over the fate of pollinators in Canada.”

About neonicotinoids:

- Neonicotinoids, or neonics, [are the most-widely used class of insecticides](#) worldwide.
- Neonics are systemic pesticides. Once applied to a plant they spread throughout its tissues – from roots, to leaves, to pollen. Neonics cannot be washed or peeled off of crops.
- Research suggests neonics have played a role in mass bee die-offs, and that the pesticides harm bees’ metabolic, immune, and reproductive functions, and negatively affect bees’ foraging and homing behaviour.
- Neonics can leach into the soil and water, where they can persist in the environment, exposing a wide range of land and water animals to toxic effects.

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As Canada's only national environmental law charity, Ecojustice is building the case for a better earth.