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Activist science puts conclusions ahead of the evidence

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By [Peter Taylor](#)

Conclusions first. Then the evidence.

Not the way you'd expect scientists to go about their business.

But it is becoming a disturbingly common practice for activist scientists, who are cheerleaders for particular policies or points of view rather than unbiased arbiters of facts.

Two current examples of this ongoing perversion of modern science are worth exploring: one concerns the war on obesity and vilification of soft drinks, the other the fate of the honey bee. In both cases, methodical rigor has been sacrificed to maximize public attention and political effect.

With reported obesity rates on the rise, much attention has been placed on soda and other sugary drinks. While Statistics Canada data shows consumption of soda is on a long, slow decline in this country, public health advocates argue the opposite — pop volumes are on the rise and only new taxes can stem the tide.

Last year, a peer-reviewed article in the Canadian Journal of Diabetes purported to uncover massive amounts of previously unreported sugary beverage consumption, largely from energy drinks and soda fountains found in fast food restaurants and convenience stores.

Using data from the market research firm Euromonitor, Prof. Kim Raine of the University of Alberta's school of public health and several co-authors claimed Canadians consume an astounding 383 litres of pop and other sugary drinks per year.

More than a litre per day. For every person in Canada. It's an absurd amount. Nevertheless, the 383 litre figure has been widely used as conclusive evidence of the need for new soda taxes. I had it thrown at me during a radio debate on the pros and cons of food taxation.

In fact, the number is complete rubbish. All it took was a phone call by me to Euromonitor to reveal Raine and her colleagues had carelessly misread a single chart in their rush to implicate soda as liquid man-killer.

Such a troubling lack of thoroughness may be due to a willingness among public health scolds to believe whatever furthers their objectives of new food taxes.

Canadians actually drink about 110 litres per person per year, a 70 per cent reduction from what was claimed. The authors also got the trend line wrong; in 2001 it was about 123 litres. Sugary drink consumption is on the decline.

Following my efforts, the authors agreed to a correction notice in the diabetes journal. Curiously, however, they claim their massive mistake doesn't alter a thing. "Our conclusions are unchanged" the retraction reads. Taxes are still necessary.

So it doesn't matter if soda consumption is high or low, rising or falling – new taxes are always the answer. Their conclusion, in other words, is entirely independent of the evidence. Whatever you want to call this, it's certainly not science.

Another worrisome case of advocacy science concerns the stoking of public panic over the health of honey bees and a class of insecticide called neonicotinoids.

Neonics represent a revolution in field pest control, since they're applied to seeds as a coating rather than sprayed indiscriminately over fields. And they've replaced many older and far more dangerous chemicals used to control grubs and beetles.

However, a study by the European-based Task Force on Systemic Pesticides released last week claims conclusive proof neonics are laying waste to bee hives across the world.

"Scientists say they have conclusive evidence that two widely used pesticides are killing bees" is how an article last week in *The Record* summarized the report.

The report itself, which is still unpublished, is part of a massive international publicity campaign designed to put pressure on governments to ban neonics. In Canada it was released as a component of lobbying efforts by the environmental group Friends of the Earth.

Such a tight connection between lobbyists and scientists is frequently held as evidence of collusion and questionable science when industry is involved. Why should our suspicions be any different when the same tactics are employed by activist groups generally opposed to all modern farming methods?

In fact, the evidence is far from conclusive on neonics and bees.

Consider that a large-scale field experiment by Prof. Cynthia Scott-Dupree, at the University of Guelph's school of environmental sciences, reveals honey bees exposed to neonic-protected crops fare no different than bees in all-natural fields.

"We didn't find any impact in terms of bee deaths, honey production or any other determinant of bee health," she tells me.

Other research by Scott-Dupree shows that of the 20 large-scale bee death incidents attributable to pesticides in Canada between 2007 and 2012, only four can be linked to neonics.

And while bee deaths have become an issue in Ontario where neonics are used on corn and soybeans, Western Canada has no such worries despite the presence of 21 million acres of neonic-protected canola that's heavily foraged by bees. All this suggests calls for a ban are premature.

Ottawa's Pest Management Regulatory Agency has been closely watching the issue and has already imposed some new rules for neonics. It plans a major review of neonics in 2015 once the necessary data has been collected.

In other words, it will consider all the evidence first. And then come to a conclusion based on those facts. How quaint.

Peter Shawn Taylor is editor-at-large of Maclean's. He lives in Waterloo.

NORAHG RESPONDS TO THE AMATEURISH & DISCREDITED ASSESSMENT BY FRIENDS OF THE EARTH (FOE)

Peter Shawn Taylor is CORRECT ! On June 25th, 2014, Friends of the Earth, an anti-pesticide organization, alleged that « bee-killing pesticides » were found in garden center plants produced by the Nursery Industry. This assessment by FOE is OUTRAGEOUSLY FALSE ! The FOE ASSESSMENT (a.k.a. Gardeners Beware) has been DISCREDITED since its tests DID NOT CONFORM TO INTERNATIONALLY-ACCREDITED PRACTICES, and there was NO LEGAL CHAIN OF CUSTODY FOR THE PLANT SAMPLES TESTED. Experts have quickly CRITICIZED AND CONDEMNED the AMATEURISH AND UNSCIENTIFIC ASSESSMENT by FOE, which was NOT performed under GOOD LABORATORY PRACTICE. World-wide, the EXPERT AND SCIENTIFIC ASSESSMENTS of ALL pest control products must be conducted under those guidelines which adhere to principles of the INTERNATIONALLY-ACCREDITED GOOD LABORATORY PRACTICE (GLP). FOE is relying upon an assessment that is not subject to stringent GLP requirements or statutory sanction. Consequently, the FOE ASSESSMENT IS DISCREDITED ! Additionally, experts have quickly CRITICIZED AND CONDEMNED the AMATEURISH AND UNSCIENTIFIC ASSESSMENT by FOE, since there was NO LEGAL CHAIN OF CUSTODY FOR THE PLANT SAMPLES TESTED. The samples themselves were collected by MERE GARDENING HOUSEWIVES. And the samples were then

handled by FOE-Activists, who have a CLEAR POLITICAL AGENDA against Neonicotinoid Insecticides. It is extremely likely that FOE-Activists TAMPERED WITH THE SAMPLES BY DELIBERATELY CONTAMINATING THEM WITH INSECTICIDE. The TAMPERING was performed with the MALICIOUS INTENT of COERCING AND INTIMIDATING Government Officials into PROHIBITING Neonicotinoid insecticides. Consequently, the FOE ASSESSMENT IS AGAIN DISCREDITED ! The FOE ASSESSMENT has been further DISCREDITED since its finding COULD NOT BE PUBLISHED IN ANY PEER-REVIEWED AND LEGITIMATE SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL. The FOE ASSESSMENT is merely an AMATEURISH ATTEMPT TO PERFORM PESTICIDE RESEARCH. It is clear that the AMATEURISH AND UNSCIENTIFIC FOE ASSESSMENT was performed with a POLITICAL AGENDA TO CONSPIRE TO IMPOSE PROHIBITION against Neonicotinoid Insecticides used in the Urban Landscape, the Nursery Industry, and the Agriculture Industry. Moreover, the mere ability to measure or detect the presence of an insecticide ingredient in a plant is NOT AN INDICATION that it poses any risk to bees, especially in PARTS PER MILLION. Neonicotinoid Insecticides WILL CAUSE NO HARM TO BEES since their exposure is at VERY LOW LEVELS, FAR TOO LOW TO CAUSE HARMFUL EFFECTS. Even at these LOW LEVELS, the active ingredient is SHORT-LIVED. Additionally, Neonicotinoid Insecticides WILL CAUSE NO HARM TO BEES since the active ingredients work their way SYSTEMICALLY TO THE INSIDE OF THE PLANT. The plant tissues contain only TINY amounts of ingredient THAT ARE UNAVAILABLE TO BEES SINCE THEY ARE NOT FEEDING ON THE PLANTS. It is a MYTH to believe that plants treated with Neonicotinoid Insecticides will somehow cause harm to bees. It is clear that FOE has a CLEAR POLITICAL AGENDA TO CONSPIRE TO IMPOSE PROHIBITION against Neonicotinoid Insecticides. FOE is operated by TRUTH-CHALLENGED NON-EXPERT ANTI-PESTICIDE LOBBYISTS who are PAID-FOR-PROFIT TO SUBVERSIVELY CONCOCT IMAGINARY DANGERS about pest control products. The AMATEURISH AND UNSCIENTIFIC FOE ASSESSMENT DOES NOT PROVIDE ANY credible information to EPA and Health Canada to justify its SUBVERSIVE ANTI-PESTICIDE CONSPIRACY CAMPAIGN. FOE also RIDICULOUSLY IMPLIES that its AMATEURISH AND UNSCIENTIFIC ASSESSMENT is somehow being withheld from Health Canada, EPA, and EVERY other regulatory agency in the world. Health Canada and EPA, and NOT FOE, have the ESSENTIAL EXPERTISE and CREDIBILITY concerning pest control products. Friends Of The Earth's ASSESSMENT has been DISCREDITED, and this organization clearly HAS NO EXPERTISE regarding pest control products. When used properly, Neonicotinoid Insecticides CAUSE NO HARM, and DO NOT HURT BEES. For the whole truth regarding BEES, go to ... <http://wp.me/p1jq40-6WJ> <http://wp.me/P1jq40-2BA> <http://wp.me/p1jq40-6H8> <http://wp.me/p1jq40-7ty> NORAHG is the National Organization Responding Against HUJE that seek to destroy the Green space industry. WILLIAM H.

GATHERCOLE AND NORAH G. Get the latest details at The Pesticide Truths Web-Site <http://pesticidetruths.com/> and go to The Complete Library Of Web-Pages, Reports, & References <http://wp.me/P1jq40-2rr>