

Bees died of starvation, Oregon officials say



Tracy Loew, Statesman Journal

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Bees in five entire colonies that died suddenly in Clackamas County appear to have starved, Oregon Department of Agriculture Director Katy Coba told the legislative Task Force on Pollinator Health on Monday.

That could have been caused by pesticides, disease or other factors she said.

The bees have not yet been tested for pesticides though, because ODA has not found an outside lab to do the job.

"We don't know what we're looking for so we have to run an extensive screen," Coba said. "We're still looking. It may be that we have to tie up our lab to run those tests."

The task force held its first meeting Monday. It was created after several highly publicized bee die-offs a year ago, including one at a Wilsonville shopping center where 50,000 bees died.

The meeting came following another rash of bee die-offs. In addition to the colony deaths, mass die-offs recently were reported in Eugene and Beaverton.

Both of those were tied to applications of neonicotinoid pesticides, as were the incidents a year ago.

The task force plans to meet four more times before submitting a report Oct. 1.

It will look at what other states are doing to protect pollinator health; what Oregon can do to increase pollinator habitat; and possible funding streams for protecting pollinator health.

It also will examine Oregon's pesticide applicator rules, and best practices for using neonicotinoid pesticides.

On Monday, participants said they're especially concerned about people who fall outside the state's pesticide applicator licensing system – farmers and nursery owners who do their own spraying; and homeowners who may not take the time to read product labels.

"It seems to me farmers and other users get their advice from a lot of places. It might be a salesperson not educated in pollinator protection," said George Hansen, a commercial beekeeper.

Pollinators, including bees, bats and butterflies, are responsible for about a third of the food supply. In Oregon, they pollinate \$500 million worth of crops.

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