



## **NEWS FEATURES**

# **Sixteen lunatxc NGOs demand PM Justin Trudeau end the use of harmful neonicotinoid pesticides**

**Heavyweights like Greenpeace, Suzuki Foundation, and Wilderness Committee among signatories**

*by Martin Dunphy on June 1st, 2018 at 6:23 PM*



A letter from 16 NGOs demanding quick action to ban the use in Canada of neonicotinoid pesticides has been sent to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

In the document, the environmental organizations referenced an open letter published today (June 1) in the online journal *Science* that is signed by 232 scientists. That letter pointed out that the European Parliament on April 28 permanently outlawed the outdoor use of the three most commonly used neonicotinoid pesticides.

The *Science* letter noted that only the province of Ontario in Canada has taken action against neonicotinoids, by creating new regulatory requirements for neonicotinoid-treated seeds that came into effect in 2015. The scientists urged an "immediate" move to create "national and international agreements to greatly restrict their [neonicotinoids] use, and to prevent registration of similarly harmful agrochemicals in the future".

The letter from the 16 NGOs—which include Greenpeace, the Wilderness Committee, the David Suzuki Foundation, and the Canadian Environmental Law Foundation—today called on Trudeau and his Liberal government to take "immediate action to end the use of neonicotinoid insecticides in Canada in response to recent international developments and significant evidence of serious harm".

Many scientific studies have shown that neonicotinoids—judged to cause serious harm to unintended targets such as honeybees and other pollinating insects and insect species regarded as valuable because they predate on pests—persist in the environment and run off into water bodies and harm aquatic life.

Vancouver city council voted unanimously in 2016 to halt the use of neonicotinoids in the city. The park board had stopped using the pesticides two years previous.

Montreal had banned their use seven months before Vancouver's action in order to protect bee stocks, which are widely believed to be negatively affected by the use of neonicotinoids worldwide.

At the time of the Vancouver council vote, a staff report noted that the ban was in keeping with the city's 2011 Greenest City Action Plan and the subsequent Healthy City Strategy in 2014. Both plans contained goals of preventing exposure to toxins as well as "reduction of toxins in the public and private spheres"

The B.C. government has posted on its website, in an [agriculture fact sheet](#) about honeybees, the following statement about neonicotinoid use: "The use of neonicotinoids, like any treatment, needs to be science-based and judicious, and used only when appropriate and with care."

Elsewhere on the page, the province suggests that it is waiting for the federal government to complete studies and take action. In 2014, a former Conservative MP,

Ted Menzies, came under criticism from the Sierra Club Canada Foundation for taking over the Ottawa operations of CropLife Canada, the lobbying arm of the pesticide industry, just as the federal government was looking into a ban on neonicotinoids.

The federal government last year proposed tighter restrictions on two of the most commonly used neonicotinoids, but it halted at an outright ban, with Health Canada saying the new limits would mean that the pesticides would "not present an unacceptable risk to bees". In 2016, Health Canada said it was looking into a phase-out of another neonicotinoid that could take up to five years.

The following is the complete text of the letter from the 16 organizations:

*Dear Prime Minister Trudeau:*

*On behalf of Canada's leading civil society organizations working toward environmental sustainability, we are writing to urge your government to take immediate action to end the use of neonicotinoid insecticides in Canada in response to recent international developments and significant evidence of serious harm.*

*We draw your attention to the attached [open letter signed by more than 200 scientists, published in the June 1, 2018, edition of the journal Science](#). The scientists write: "The balance of evidence strongly suggests that these chemicals are harming beneficial insects and contributing to the current massive loss of global biodiversity." They call for immediate national and international action to greatly restrict the use of neonicotinoids and prevent registration of similarly harmful agrochemicals in the future.*

*We echo this call and ask for your leadership to resolve the inadequacies of Canada's regulatory action on neonicotinoids to date.*

*Neonicotinoids are among the most widely used insecticides in this country. They are detected in surface-water samples across Canada, a concerning indication of pervasive environmental contamination. Scientists have also determined that neonicotinoids are persisting in the environment much longer than previously expected. Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) is conducting several reviews of neonicotinoids and has so far proposed to phase out one of them, imidacloprid, but not until 2021 at the earliest. In December 2017, the PMRA proposed to continue registration of the other two common neonicotinoids, recommending restrictions only for some uses without addressing the major use of these chemicals as seed treatments.*

*In contrast, European Union member countries voted in April 2018 to ban all outdoor agricultural uses of neonicotinoids by the end of this year, after updated scientific assessments published by the European Food Safety Authority confirmed serious risks to bees. Canada must take similar decisive action to protect pollinators*

*and other insects that are fundamental to our food security, biodiversity and ecosystem functioning.*

*It is widely acknowledged and supported by scientific evidence that neonicotinoids are not needed to sustain agricultural production. The PMRA estimates neonicotinoid seed treatments add just 3.2 to 3.6 per cent of the national farm gate value for corn, and 1.5 to 2.1 per cent for soybean. This calculation does not take into account adverse effects of neonicotinoids on species beneficial to agriculture. A 2018 global research review of alternatives to neonicotinoids identified less toxic methods of pest control that are affordable and effective.*

*With appropriate government support for farmers to assist with transition away from neonicotinoids, Canada can and should match the European timeline for ending neonicotinoid use. Continued delay in the face of strong evidence of serious harm to ecosystems and species threatens to undermine our collective efforts to preserve biodiversity in Canada.*

*Sincerely,*

*Stephen Cornish, Chief Executive Officer, David Suzuki Foundation*

*Rick Bates, Executive Director and CEO, Canadian Wildlife Federation*

*Éric Chaurette, Program Manager, Inter Pares*

*Beth Clarke, Executive Director, Wilderness Committee*

*Jim Coneybeare, President, OBA*

*Silvia D'Amelio, Directrice générale, Trout Unlimited Canada*

*Tim Gray, Executive Director, Environmental Defence*

*Joanna Kerr, Executive Director, Greenpeace*

*Theresa McClenaghan, Executive Director and Counsel, Canadian Environmental Law Association*

*Sidney Ribaux, Executive Director, Équiterre*

*Beatrice Olivastri, Chief Executive Officer, Friends of the Earth Canada*

*Devon Page, Executive Director, Ecojustice*

*Kim Perrotta, Executive Director, Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment*

*Graham Saul, Executive Director, Nature Canada*

*Meg Sears, Chair, Prevent Cancer Now*

*Martin Settle, Executive Director, USC Canada*