

Équiterre pushes Ottawa to speed up plan to ban bee-killing pesticides

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Nicotine-based pesticides are most commonly used by soy and corn farmers to help keep crops free of pests, but they have also proven to be killing bees. (Mike Blake/Reuters)

A Montreal-based environmental group is demanding that Ottawa move faster to ban the pesticides blamed for killing off Canada's bees and damaging wildlife.

"Once you've decided the science is clear, that it is having a huge impact on such an important species as bees — which are so important for agriculture in general because of pollination — then it would make sense for them to ban it right away," Sidney Ribaux told CBC Montreal's *Daybreak* Tuesday.

Ribaux is the co-founder and executive director of Équiterre — a non-profit environmental group that has been pushing for the federal ban on neonicotinoids, also known as neonics.

The nicotine-based pesticides are proven to be a danger to bees, as well as other species, such as frogs, birds, fish and earthworms.

In an open letter and [petition](#) on its website, Équiterre is asking Canada to respond as other countries already have, which is to "ban [neonics] right away," Ribaux said.

Instead, Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) is proposing a risk-management plan that phases out two out of three neonicotinoid imidacloprid pesticides — clothianidin and thiamethoxam — over a three- to five-year period.

Health Canada has said final decisions on the pesticides will be made at the end of 2019.

"The department can immediately cancel or make changes to how a product can be used if it is found to be seriously impacting human health or the environment, or if there is a high likelihood of serious or severe effects occurring from its continued use," Health Canada spokesperson Geoffroy Legault-Thivierge told CBC News Tuesday.

"Health Canada will continue to review new scientific information as it becomes available."

Health Canada scientists have already reviewed more than 1,000 scientific studies related to neonicotinoids, the agency said in August.

Proposed ban may not go into full effect until 2025

The three-to-five-year phase-out wouldn't begin until the proposal is approved, meaning it may not come until full effect until 2025 — a delay Ribaux describes as "ridiculous."

"If you had medication that was on the market that was killing people, then you wouldn't wait seven years before taking it off the market," he said. "You would take it off right away."

Équiterre's demand that Ottawa address the issue is not new, as the PMRA has been studying neonics since 2012 while environmental groups and scientists alike have long pushed for a ban.

Neonics use up

"Over the last decade, the amount of neonicotinoids used in agriculture has increased substantially," states Health Canada in an August statement.

Health Canada's re-evaluation of neonicotinoids identified "that it was being measured at levels that are harmful to certain aquatic insect populations, a critical food source for fish, birds and other animals."



Bees pollinate crops and contribute to a third of the food we consume, but a dangerous group of pesticides is threatening their survival. (AFP/Getty Images)

The three-year phase-out will allow for the orderly removal of product from the marketplace and alternatives to be identified, Legault-Thivierge said. Five years may be needed to develop new alternatives where none are available, he added.

Yet many of these pesticides are banned by European Union, and alternatives are already readily available, counters Ribaux.

Quebec, Ontario establish provincial bans

Ontario limited use of the pesticides in 2015, and its regulations went into full effect last year.

Quebec has also unveiled its own to restrict the use of pesticides, including all three types of neonicotinoids, while Vancouver and Montreal have both banned their use entirely within city limits.