

# Ontario must reverse course on Pesticides Regulation changes to protect pollinators | Ontario Nature

*Fine print in regulatory proposals flowing from Bill 132 removes accountability mechanisms, invites over-use of bee-killing neonic pesticides.*

Brown-belted bumble bee © Diana Troya

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**Toronto, Ont., November 14, 2019** — Regulatory changes proposed in conjunction with Bill 132, the *Better for People, Smarter for Business Act*, would undermine Ontario's restrictions on neonicotinoid insecticides ("neonics") by doing away with important accountability mechanisms, according to environmental and health groups and Ontario beekeepers.

"Opening the door to increased pesticide use won't make Ontario better or smarter," said Muhannad Malas, toxics program manager at Environmental Defence. "On the contrary, they kick the teeth out of a central pillar of Ontario's Pollinator Health Strategy and will deprive government of basic information needed for making good decisions. This is a big step backwards for bee health in Ontario."

"Robust pesticide regulations are crucial to protect public health and the environment," said David Suzuki Foundation senior researcher and analyst Lisa Gue. "The rollbacks the government is proposing leave us all vulnerable."

Since 2015, Ontario's Pesticide Regulation has prohibited the sale and use of neonicotinoid-treated corn and soybean seeds, except where relevant insect pests are present and verified by an independent third party. The government is proposing to remove requirements for seed vendors to report sales numbers for treated and untreated seeds, and for the government to publicly post seed sales data. Furthermore, the amendments would eliminate third-party assessment of pest threats as a requirement for accessing neonic-treated seeds under the current rules.

"Independent verification and regular reporting on results are essential to enable the government to track progress toward reducing use of neonics and enforce restrictions," said Evidence for Democracy executive director Katie Gibbs. "It is troubling that the government would sneak such anti-democratic measures into an omnibus bill package."

"These public accountability mechanisms are fundamental to maintaining public confidence in the regulatory system," agreed Beatrice Olivastri, CEO, Friends of the Earth Canada.

Neonics are highly toxic to bees and other beneficial organisms. Seed treatments represent the largest use and have resulted in widespread environmental contamination, contributing to the precipitous decline of pollinators. Federal and provincial governments share responsibility for regulating pesticides.

"Beekeepers in Ontario remain under pressure from high winter mortality, excessive queen replacements and low honey yields," says Ontario Beekeepers' Association president Andre Flys. "Much of this pressure can be traced to persistent pesticide exposure, and loss of forage to corn, soy and development. Ontario must continue to support pollinator health by addressing the overuse of all pesticides, especially neonics and other systemic water-soluble pesticides."

Ontario's Pesticide Regulation also currently bans the use and sale of so-called cosmetic pesticides, except products that meet low-risk criteria. The government has stated that Ontario remains committed to its cosmetic pesticides ban. However, the proposed amendments to the regulation change the original language of the low-risk criteria, paving the way for some banned lawn and garden pesticides to potentially be re-introduced.

For the pesticide industry, months of lobbying has already paid off handsomely. CropLife Canada, the national pesticide industry lobby group, stated in a communiqué to its members about the pesticide provisions in Bill 132, "After years of lobbying... [the amendments] provide our industry with several of the changes we have been asking for."

"Ontario's world class ban on non-essential lawn and garden pesticides protects public health and the environment. If the government is truly committed to upholding the ban, it needs to tighten up the language in its proposed amendments, apply the precautionary principle and maintain the original criteria for determining allowed lower-risk pesticides," said Randall McQuaker, pesticides director with the Canadian Association of Physicians for the environment.

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*In addition to undermining restrictions on bee-killing neonics, [Bill 132 will also](#) put the aggregate industry ahead of communities trying to protect groundwater, and will make it cheaper for industry to pollute.*

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