

Environmental groups back in court over pollinator-killing pesticides

Groups ready to fight off federal government's attempt to dismiss lawsuit

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TORONTO – Ecojustice lawyers are in court this week to tell the federal government to buzz off.

“Our clients – and the bees and other wild pollinators – deserve their day in court,” said Julia Croome, Ecojustice lawyer. “The federal government has for years allowed widespread and growing use of neonicotinoid pesticides without doing its homework on the environmental risks. Our case aims to change that.”

Ecojustice, acting on behalf of David Suzuki Foundation, Friends of the Earth Canada, Ontario Nature and Wilderness Committee, filed a lawsuit last year to protect pollinators from two widely-used neonicotinoid pesticides, Clothianidin and Thiamethoxam. The government and several multinational pesticide companies are now attempting to persuade the court to dismiss the case before it is heard.

This comes on the heels of the [world's largest study](#), published in Science journal. The study showed widespread evidence of population decline and shortened lifespans in domesticated and wild bees populations exposed to neonics. A [separate study](#) conducted in Canada discovered that prolonged exposure to neonicotinoids affects honey-bee health in corn-growing regions.

“We are deeply concerned to see the government being so laissez-faire about neonicotinoids’ risks to pollinators,” said Caroline Schulz, executive director at Ontario Nature. “In approving these deadly pesticides, the government is not properly determining the risks in the first place.”

Neonics are synthetic chemical insecticides that are intended to control crop-destroying pests. However, they pose threats to non-target organisms like native bees, which are responsible for pollinating one third of the world's crops and 90 per cent of all wild plants.

“The broad reaching effects of neonicotinoids are deeply concerning. They’re decimating bee populations and while other jurisdictions like the EU and France are sounding the alarm, we’re still waiting for our government to assess all the science,” said Beatrice Olivastri, chief executive officer of Friends of the Earth Canada.

“Evidence-based decision-making is a core tenet of our democracy. It demands that we use the best available information when making decisions that affect human health and the environment,” said Faisal Moola, director-general of the David Suzuki foundation. “Disappointingly, the federal government has taken a see-no-evil, hear-no-evil, speak-no-evil approach when it comes to regulating these pesticides, which is why we are taking it to court.”

The groups’ lawsuit argues that the Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) failed to live up to its legal responsibilities as a regulator, and continues to unlawfully register a number of pesticides containing Clothianidin and Thiamethoxam for use and sale in Canada.

The federal *Pest Control Products Act* requires the PMRA to have “reasonable certainty” that a pesticide will cause no harm to the environment before registering it for use and sale in Canada. More than a

decade ago the PMRA granted “conditional” registrations for two neonicotinoid pesticides, putting off for a later day its review of scientific information on the pesticides’ risks to pollinators. Years later the PMRA is still waiting for studies sufficient to justify “full” registration of the pesticides.

“Other jurisdictions have already moved to ban these pesticides over concerns about their impact on pollinators, the environment, and human health,” said Beth Clarke, Wilderness Committee development and program director. “It’s time for the federal government to do its part to protect pollinators.”

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