

Updates

Confirming the Neonicotinoid Threat, Business Takes an Important Small Step

There have been several important developments further to Brittany Verbeek's warning in the April *Advocate* about the harm neonicotinoids do to pollinators. The seriousness of Brittany's warning was just underlined by a peer-reviewed analysis conducted by the Task Force on Systemic Pesticides. This task force, created by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature, analyzed 800 peer-reviewed studies and concluded "that there is clear evidence of harm sufficient to trigger regulatory action."

Dr. Jean-Marc Bonmatin, one of the lead authors of the Task Force's *Worldwide Integrated Assessment*, said there is no doubt about the harm caused by the use of neonicotinoids and other systemic pesticides. "We are witnessing a threat," in his words, "to the productivity of our natural and farmed environment equivalent to that posed by organophosphates or DDT." The alarm raised by Rachel Carson more than fifty years ago against chemical "elixirs of death" led to the ban of DDT in Canada and the United States in 1972, ten years after the publication of *Silent Spring*.

Terrestrial invertebrates such as earthworms are the most affected groups of species. Bees, butterflies, and other insect pollinators are the next most affected group. Aquatic invertebrates, while the least affected, are nonetheless vulnerable. Vertebrate animals are less susceptible but seed-eating birds face risks from eating crop seeds treated with these systemic pesticides.

On a more positive note, Home Depot announced that its home and garden suppliers must label any plants treated with neonicotinoid pesticides by this fall. It is the largest retailer to announce plans to address the neonicotinoid threat. Unfortunately,

this important piece of information is only likely to be used by those consumers already aware of the threats neonicotinoids pose. Other small retailers and nurseries in the United States have pledged more ambitious bans against the use of neonicotinoids in their operations (<http://www.foe.org/beeaction/retailers>).

Friends of the Earth Canada is petitioning Canadian retailers to stop selling plants pre-treated with these pesticides, to ban the use of neonic pesticides in their operations, and to educate consumers about the threats these pesticides present to pollinators. The petition may be found at <http://foecanada.org/en/takeaction/home-garden-petition/>.

- Ian Urquhart