



COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

Cathy Wolfe  
District One  
Sandra Romero  
District Two  
Karen Valenzuela  
District Three

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## RESOURCE STEWARDSHIP DEPARTMENT

*Creating Solutions for Our Future*

Cliff Moore  
Director

**To:** Thurston County Commissioners: Cathy Wolfe, Commissioner District 1; Sandra Romero, Commissioner District 2; Karen Valenzuela, Commissioner District 3

**From:** Thurston County Agricultural Advisory Committee

**Re:** An issue of concern: Retail sales of systemic neonicotinoid insecticides and their effect on honey bees.

The June meeting of Ag Advisory group dealt with a letter from the Olympia Beekeepers Association (attached) requesting that the committee recommend county action to restrict retail sales of the systemic insecticides of the neonicotinoid group to all except those with a valid pesticide applicators license. The letter detailed the severe hive mortality experienced this past year by local beekeepers and detailed some of the evidence linking colony collapse with exposure to neonicotinoids.

At the request of the Committee, Lucas Patzek, staff to the Committee and Director of WSU Thurston County Extension, arranged for a live video conference with Dr. Timothy Lawrence, WSU Island County Extension Director, who gave a slide presentation on "Bees and Neonicotinoids" and answered questions from the Committee. Dr. Lawrence's qualifications include a Ph.D. in environmental science from Ohio State University, work experience as a Research Associate in WSU's Honey Bee Health Program, and 20 years' experience working as a commercial beekeeper. Additionally, he is working to improve honey bee stock together with his wife Susan Cobey, who is a world-renowned bee geneticist and breeder with a split appointment between WSU and UC Davis, and WSU Department of Entomology professor and chair Dr. Steve Sheppard.

In response to questions from Committee members, Dr. Lawrence referred a number of times to a 44 page report, "Are Neonicotinoids Killing Bees? A Review of Research into the Effects of Neonicotinoid Insecticides on Bees, with Recommendations for Action", published by the Xerces Society, a respected educational and research non-profit involved with invertebrate conservation. The report concludes that the evidence accumulating against neonicotinoids was serious enough that their use should be restricted. While Dr. Lawrence disagreed with the conclusions of the Xerces Report, a minority of the Committee, citing the precautionary principle, agreed with the conclusions of the Xerces report.

**Recommendation of the Agricultural Advisory Committee:** Although the majority of the Committee, and Dr. Lawrence, did not feel there is enough evidence at this time to recommend that Thurston County mandate an applicator's license for home users of neonicotinoids, as requested by John O'Brien and the Olympia Beekeepers Association, we felt it was important to



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alert you of an issue that might require action in the future and we urge you to contact the WSDA and request that they review the current literature on this issue and determine what the appropriate regulatory steps might be. Some counties in the country have banned the sale of neonicotinoids and that could ultimately be an appropriate step. Another step might be to require that a pesticide license be required to purchase neonicotinoids for ornamental use.

Sincerely,

Pat Labine  
Interim Chair

May 1, 2012

Thurston County Agricultural Advisory Board

Dear Thurston County Agricultural Advisory Board:

We are writing to ask you assistance in advising the Thurston County Commissioners to put some some limits in place in Thurston County to lessen the exposure of honeybees and other insect pollinators to what we believe is a class of insecticides which are very dangerous to the survival of honeybees.

The class of insecticides known as neonicotinoids are systemic pesticides, meaning that they are taken up by the plants and are present in all parts from roots to sap to pollen. A susceptible insect feeding on any part of the plant including its nectar or pollen (as bees do) is thus exposed to the insecticide

Imidacloprid, the top revenue-generating pesticide for the Bayer Corporation in the world, is the top selling insecticide in the world. There are over 230 products registered with the California Department of Agriculture as containing imidacloprid as an ingredient or the main one. Requirements for labeling by the federal government for insecticides are so variable as to be meaningless. Although there are numerous studies in both laboratory and field conditions documenting effects believed to be linked to Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) including precocious foraging behavior, increased susceptibility to bee diseases and parasites including Nosema and Varroa mites and inability to navigate, these products are still sold with what we consider to be inadequate labeling precautions, and based on junk science (see Wiki Bee leaks link). The central symptom of CCD has been documented to be reproduced by exposure to neonicotinoids alone, even in amounts undetectable by present technology to the investigators who applied the insecticide to the bees they studied.

Although labeling for these 230 plus products touts claims like “kills up to 200 kinds of insects for up to 12 months” the vast majority offer no warnings of toxicity to honeybees, even in the finest print. The few that do have warnings about honeybees say such things as “do not apply when honeybees are foraging. .” In Washington state, that may be every month of the year.

In the last 6 years overwinter losses of honeybee colonies have ranged between 30 and 37%. Over the past year, the experience of members of the Olympia Beekeepers which includes both amateurs and professionals, has risen dramatically to unsustainable and alarming levels of 75-85%. Some of the professionals have been caring for honeybees for over 40 years, and have never seen losses like this.

Therefore, we are asking that you advise the Thurston County County Commissioners to request that the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) require that products containing neonicotinoids, most especially imidacloprid and clothianidin, be limited for sale into, use, distribution or application in Thurston County to individuals or entities which possess a valid pesticide applicator license issued under the WSDA mandates. Per Margaret Tucker, director of pesticide compliance services at Washington State Department of Agriculture, this action is clearly within the mandate of the WSDA.

There is state precedent for such action, in that these products have fine print that says “not for sale into, distribution and/or use in Nassau, Suffolk, Kings, and Queens counties of New York.”

We are asking for this on an emergency basis.

Mark Emrick, President  
Olympia Beekeepers' Association