

EPA Unlikely To Approve New Or Expanded Use Of Some Pesticides Amid Honey Bee Decline

Reuters

(Reuters) - The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) said on Thursday it was unlikely to approve new or expanded uses of certain pesticides while it evaluates the risks they may pose to honey bees.



The so-called neonicotinoid pesticides are routinely used in agriculture and applied to plants and trees in gardens and parks. But their widespread use has come under scrutiny in recent years after a drop in the number of honey bees and other pollinating insects, which play key roles in food production.

The decline is attributed to factors including pesticide and herbicide use, habitat loss and disease, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The EPA notice came the day after Oregon's largest city suspended the use of the pesticides on its property to protect honey bees.

The unanimous vote on Wednesday by the Portland City Commission came despite protests from farmers, nursery owners and others who claimed the insecticide was crucial in combating pests that destroy crops and other plants. Portland is among at least eight municipalities that have banned the chemicals.

The EPA is conducting an assessment of the six types of neonicotinoids and their impact on honey bees, with its evaluation of four expected by 2018 and the remaining two a year later.

In the interim, the agency said in a statement that its move stemmed from the agency's "ongoing effort to protect pollinators."

But the federal environmental regulators said they would review the suspension "if a significant new pest issue should arise that may be uniquely addressed by one of these chemicals."

The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation said the EPA's latest measure on neonicotinoids, which are taken up by plants through roots and leaves, was insufficient.

"The reality is, there are risks to our pollinators with current uses (of the insecticide)," said Amy Code, the Xerces Society's pesticide program coordinator.

The EPA and a group representing farmers and other pesticide users could not immediately be reached for comment.

(Reporting by Laura Zuckerman in Salmon, Idaho; Editing by Curtis Skinner and Alan Raybould)