

# POLLINATORS AND PESTICIDES 2011

## *Fundamental Flaws of Pesticide Policy in the United States*

---Opinion paper of the National Honey Bee Advisory Board---  
January 2011, Galveston, Texas



### **NATIONAL HONEY BEE ADVISORY BOARD (NHBAB)**

*promoting the  
sustainability of bees  
and other pollinators  
through:*

- \*balanced pesticide policy
- \*evidence based decision making
- \*proactive education

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NHBAB Represents the two National Beekeeper Trade Associations in the U.S.: the American Beekeeping Federation (ABF) and the American Honey Producers Association (AHPA).

NHBAB believes that certain pesticides deleteriously impact the health of honey bee colonies; threaten the sustainability of the U.S. beekeeping industry; and significantly imperil our national food supply.

All Members of NHBAB are Professional Beekeepers. As such, each has experience with pesticide related mortality in their respective honey bee operations. They were chosen to serve this industry-wide capacity because of their personal and professional qualifications.

Please contact any board member (listed on the back of this paper) with your questions, comments, or concerns.

It is the strongly held opinion of the NHBAB that pollinator injury from pesticide use in the United States is a serious problem in need of much greater attention by all concerned parties. Two years worth of NHBAB meetings with environmental groups, representatives of the chemical industry, EPA and USDA have helped shed light on some specific areas of concern. We share these concerns with you in this brief paper.

Pollinator protection is divided into two main areas of focus: Risk Assessment and Risk Management. Broadly speaking, Risk Assessment consists of testing done before registration to identify toxic effects. Risk Management is the process of monitoring, investigating and preventing injury from occurring related to product use. EPA is charged under FIFRA to “protect the environment, including pollinators, from potential effects of pesticides.”

Risk Assessment in the United States relies heavily on industry funded and directed studies. Companies developing new active ingredients conduct toxicity testing and submit the results to EPA at the time of application for registration. EPA evaluates these tests, and makes a determination to either grant or deny conditional or full registration. Chemical company toxicity studies are then considered “proprietary” information associated with registration and not required to be made publicly available.

Fundamental shortcomings of the Risk Assessment process include:

- Conflict of interests (toxicity studies paid for by companies with vested financial interest in getting the product registered).
- Overreliance on acute LD 50 measure of toxicity has resulted in overlooking potential sub lethal and chronic exposure issues.
- No appropriate risk assessment testing exists to evaluate the “systemic” mode of action, and determine “safe” exposure levels. Yet products with this mode of action have been approved for use for 18 years.
- EPA only requires manufacturers to test “active” ingredients. Product formulations contain many other ingredients. “Inerts” are not tested, and tank mixing of multiple products is currently permitted without additional testing of these mixtures.
- Conditional Registrations are granted to new pesticides over 67% of the time. Such “Conditional” Registrations permit known data gaps allowing additional safety testing to be conducted after the product is labeled and approved. In many cases this allows for the marketing and use of products that are efficacious but may not be safe for bees or the environment in general.

Risk management in the United States relies on “state primacy partners” to oversee enforcement of laws related to FIFRA on a state-by-state basis. US EPA promulgates the rules and approves legal directives for use, and issues environmental cautions which are written by pesticide manufacturers for pesticide products. These label directives define legal and illegal uses and procedures for the product. **The label is the law.** States perform risk management, usually through their department of agriculture, who conduct investigations of pesticide injury complaints. The states decide *if* incidents are to be reported to the EIIS National Incident Data Base.

Fundamental shortcomings of the risk management process include:

- Many states claim that the label directives are vague and unenforceable, and therefore take no enforcement action.
- No mechanism short of court action exists for beekeepers to be reimbursed for losses related to pesticide injury. Pursuing legal actions can be lengthy and costly.
- Currently, many exceptions in labels are being allowed. For example the current Sevin XLR Plus label reads, “Do not apply to blooming crops or weeds, except corn or soybeans.” We feel this trend of exemptions must be changed.
- Many beekeepers have reported uncooperative--even “hostile”--attitudes from state pesticide officers when they attempt to report honey bee poisoning from pesticides. Currently, most pesticide poisonings of honey bees go unreported and add to the unrecognized burden on beekeepers from pesticide misuse.
- Lab sampling to detect pesticide residues is often discouraged by state pesticide officers, citing the limited labs offering testing services and the high costs associated with testing.
- Pesticide poisoning incidents investigated by individual states are not required to be reported to the National Incident Data Base. Obviously, this critical piece of the feedback loop as information does not reach EPA regulators.

The National Honey Bee Advisory Board believes these fundamental shortcomings of our national pesticide policy need immediate attention. **We need beekeepers to be an active part of the solution by:**

- Reporting all suspected pesticide poisonings. This is very important. Insist on chemical lab analysis. Insist that the report is entered into the National EIIS data base. If you encounter problems with the system in your state please contact us with the details.
- Supporting additional funding of independent toxicity research.
- Contacting your Representatives in Washington and explain that pollinators require greater protections from pesticides injury.

Harmful levels of pesticides must be kept “off of” and “out of” bloom. Pollinators must be allowed safe pastures. If “economic poisons” are permitted into or onto pollen and nectar, pollinator poisoning should be expected.

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