BEYOND TOXICS
Leadership For a Clean and Just Oregon

Testimony for HB 4139 – Protecting Oregon's Pollinators

February 10, 2014

Thank you Chair Witt and members of the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee for the opportunity to testify on HB 4139, an Act to Protect Oregon's Pollinators. Saving Oregon's population of bumble bees and honey bees is a topic deserving our utmost attention. Oregon must act now to stave off bee-kills,. If we don't, we may face a situation like the one in China.

In China, the world's pear capital, it is the farmers – and not the bees, from – who carry out the pollination of the trees. It is costly and painstaking work that replaces what was determined to be bee die-offs due to exposure to pesticides. Bees are simply absent. Attached to my testimony, you will see recent photographs taken from orchards in China, where pear blossoms are pollinated one by one at a rate of thirty or so trees per day. Such drastic measures would send Oregon's pear, apple and plum businesses into a tail spin.

HB 4139 addresses the problem of a highly toxic class of pesticides, known as neonicotinoids, and their impact to all kinds of pollinating species. The Oregon Department of Agriculture has already recognized that these pesticides have the potential to kill bees outright. They are to be commended for taking some action to restrict neonicotinoids from some blossoming trees commonly used in landscaping. So, you might be thinking to yourselves, doesn't the EPA label and ODA's extra precautions eliminate the risk to bees from the use of neonicotinoids?

No, it does not. EPA labeling of a pesticides is based on acute toxicity of the active ingredient. The label does not protect against other known hazards such as sub-lethal or the slow accumulation of a pesticide in nectar, pollen, or in the hive. Tissue samples taken in New York after hundreds of thousands of honey bees perished showed significant levels of neonicotinoids, but there is no way to know if the pesticide killed the bees because of an acute exposure, or the cumulative effects of repeated exposures.

Therefore, applying a pesticide according to the label is not the same thing as applying it safely. It simply means applying it legally. In fact, in a number of bee kill incidents, including some in Oregon last summer, the neonicotinoid product was applied according to the label, and the applicator was not found to be at fault.

HB 4139, as it was originally drafted, had two important outcomes:

1. Four neonicotinoid active ingredients would be restricted to use by only trained and licensed applicators. The reasons for this restriction are two-fold:
    a. Applications in nurseries, farms and landscaping businesses could continue to be carried out;
    b. General consumers who are not trained and licensed would not have access to these projects. Research by Xerces Society found that the EPA label allows general consumer use at a rate as much as 120 times in some cases over the allowed application rate for commercial users.

The restricted use status would only take from 4 to 10 pesticide products off the shelves in Oregon stores

2. Experts at OSU and ODA would jointly develop trainings for alternatives to neonicotinoids, and Pesticides and Pollinator Safety Training. The training remains an essential part of the Dash-2 amendments, including the requirement to pass the course to receive an applicators license.

I was part of a diverse group of folks who helped craft the Dash-2 Amendments. I support the proposed task force and its work toward a meaningful outcome that protects native and honey bees. Chair Witt and honorable members of this Committee, what we have at stake here is the future viability of Oregon's agricultural industry and the reliability of our food systems. If we do not act very soon to protect bees from neonicotinoids, we risk over $600 million dollars in agricultural economic benefits to this State.

There are alternatives to neonicotinoids, but there are no alternatives to natural pollination of ~~dozens~~ hundreds of acres of pears, apples, blueberries, strawberries and many other commodity crops in Oregon.

I urge you to take immediate action to pass a bill that will protect our pollinating honey bees and native bees, the future of agriculture in this state and of balance and viability in the natural environment.

Sincerely, Lisa Arkin
Executive Director, Beyond Toxics

Hand pollinating necessary in China due to bee losses.

HB 4139 – Save Oregon Pollinators