



November 3, 2014

Thurston County Board of Commissioners
2000 Lakeridge Dr SW
Building One, Room 269
Olympia, WA 98502-1045

Dear Commissioners:

We recognize and appreciate the critically important responsibility that the County has for public health in both incorporated and unincorporated Thurston County. In your capacity as stewards of the public health we request that you take all possible action available to protect domestic and native bee populations from all classes of neonicotinoids. Bees and native pollinator species are critically important to agriculture – we need them to grow our food. We are concerned that more decisive action is not being taken to educate the public and stem the uninformed use of neonicotinoids in all its various forms.

On April 8, 2013, you sent a letter to Director of Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) Don Hover concerning restrictions on the use of neonicotinoid insecticides. In response to your letter, Mr. Hover indicated in June of 2013 that while the issue is a concern for the WSDA, he lacked conclusive evidence to take action on restricting use of these chemical insecticides. In his letter he outlined additional steps that would be taken by his agency and others to better understand the connection between neonicotinoids and bee populations. We are urging the Board of County Commissioners to follow up with Director Hover to determine the current status of these efforts.

It's clear even in Director Hover's letter that there is conclusive evidence that "...researchers have shown in laboratory experiments that neonicotinoid insecticides can have adverse effects that are lethal and sub-lethal to bees, depending on the level of exposure." Hesitation from more decisive action to protect bees from these adverse effects seems to be due to it not being a proven "significant" or primary cause of colony collapse disorder. Our concern is that since we know that neonicotinoids are destructive to pollinators we should at the very least be aggressively educating the public and controlling its use so as to minimize its impact as a contributing factor to the destruction of bee populations within the county. As it stands, retailers are very likely selling plants that are labeled "bee friendly" even though they have been treated with neonicotinoids! Neonicotinoids can accumulate and last five years or more in the medium soils of ornamental plants – potentially destroying or weakening beneficial insects including bees – without the consumer even being aware that they have purchased a product that contains pesticides that have this effect.

Based on what we believe to be valid concerns of local, regional and national bee keeper associations and advocacy groups, we request that the County:

- Clarify its regulatory authority to control neonicotinoids in all its forms.
- Either direct or request voluntary compliance from all retailers to notify the public of what plants and products contain neonicotinoids, including all variants sold under different names.
- Establish interim best practice approaches to avoiding the use and further spread of neonicotinoids and other pesticides that are harmful to bees and native pollinators.
- Develop a list of retail establishments that have agreed to support and implement the best practices of managing pesticides in ways that provide maximum protection to pollinators including bees.

The City of Olympia has eliminated the use of neonicotinoid insecticides in our citywide applications. Nonetheless, we recognize that regional or statewide action is needed to have any real impact on this issue. We intend to include neonicotinoids on our legislative agenda with our state legislative delegation in the 2015 calendar year and request that the County also advocate for state wide legislative action.

We appreciate your further attention to this issue and would be grateful to hear an update at your earliest convenience as to what steps will be taken to address the concerns we have raised about the continued unregulated distribution of neonicotinoid pesticides. We have attached for your information our recently passed resolution concerning this issue.

Sincerely,

Stephen H. Buxbaum
Mayor

Attachment: Resolution # _____

cc: Olympia City Council

cc-14-44-