

Bees And Parks Moving To Be Pesticide Free?

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While other states, such as California, have introduced bee protection bills, Lisa Arkin of Beyond Toxics says she thinks Oregon is the first state to take some kind of decisive action at the state level. The city of Eugene is also looking to take further action on bee-killing pesticides.

House Bill 4139 passed in the Oregon House earlier in February, and on Feb. 24 it passed in the Senate, “showing amazing bipartisan support for protecting the bees,” according to Arkin.

The bill was amended and is not the same one that was worked on by Rep. Jeff Reardon and Beyond Toxics, Arkin says, but she is still hopeful as “it requires anyone applying for a pesticide license to take a course and pass a test designed by Oregon State University on bee health and pesticides.”

Arkin says that during work sessions on the bill with agricultural industry representatives, she and others were shocked to learn that untrained applicators apply pesticides in commercial settings, such as landscaping companies and nurseries, if the worker is “under supervision, but there’s no guarantee that the supervisor would be on site.”

“This is a labor, safety and environmental issue,” she adds. “We want to make sure any worker required in his job to use pesticides is fully trained, licensed and wearing protective equipment.” Arkin says that like an untrained driver behind the wheel of a car, an untrained person spraying potentially lethal pesticides “could have devastating results.”

The bill also establishes a governor’s task force that will bring the issue back to the Legislature in 2015 with “more firm recommendations on what our state can do to take stronger steps on pollinator exposure to neonics.” The use of some neonicotinoids was restricted in Oregon after two massive bee die-offs related to the use of the chemicals occurred in 2013. Neonics have been cited by beekeepers as a cause of bee die-offs worldwide. Many crops that humans and agricultural industries rely on use bees for pollination, Eugene City Councilor Greg Evans points out.

Arkin says a city resolution to use pesticides only as a last resort in Eugene’s public parks is scheduled for a vote in a Feb. 26 work session. Like the legislative bills, Arkin says the resolution has support across the political spectrum. Councilor Mike Clark called for exploring even broader restrictions on bee-killing chemicals at a Feb. 24 meeting. Arkin points out that use of chemicals in parks and open spaces is also a social justice issue as “no matter what neighborhood you live in you should have access to a park safe and free of toxic chemicals.”

In her public testimony to the council, Arkin says, “Medical research demonstrates that pesticides, including insecticides and herbicides, are capable of exerting toxic action on the central nervous system of developing fetuses and young children.”

Evans says “the collateral damage done to human health” as a result of pesticide exposure “is not tolerable as far as I am concerned.”

About the Author »



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Camilla Mortensen is associate editor and reporter at *Eugene Weekly*. She is also a folklorist and a community college and university instructor. She has two horses, an assortment of dogs, and lives in a 1975 Airstream trailer.

Sometimes all these details collide in unforeseen ways.

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