



Homeowners don't need free access to toxic pesticides: Guest opinion

bees.jpg

Tigard resident Kent Addleman speaks at a memorial for thousands of bees killed when trees in a Wilsonville Target parking lot were sprayed improperly with the insecticide Safari in June. *(Molly J. Smith/The Oregonian)*

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on February 09, 2014 at 8:00 AM, updated February 09, 2014 at 8:01 AM

By Lisa Arkin

In **one of its "Agenda 2014" editorials**, The Oregonian urges readers to pay attention to upcoming statewide issues that may affect personal freedoms. The editorial dodged the two most important issues when it comes to discussing freedoms: the need for all of us to become better informed, and the responsibilities that go along with personal freedoms.

For example, the editors supported having driver cards for immigrants, assuming they would drive anyway and it would be better if they mastered traffic laws. In other words, drivers should be trained and licensed before taking a potentially deadly vehicle on the road.

The editors, however, blasted a proposal to require a state-issued license for those using a particularly venomous insecticide that builds up in the blossoms and nectar of plants and kills bumble- and honey bees. It was such a class of insecticides, called neonicotinoids, that caused the massive bee die-offs in Portland, Wilsonville, Hillsboro and West Linn this past summer.

The editors suggest that home gardeners will suffer a loss of personal freedom if this highly toxic class of systemic insecticides is restricted. The editors are correct that the bill would, in their words, "effectively wrest several pesticides from the hands of home gardeners." Just how many? Xerces Society did a review of neonicotinoid products intended for backyard gardeners and found that, on average, between four and 10 products would be removed from shelves because of this legislation.

A restriction is not a ban. The restricted use classification means only trained and licensed pesticide applicators or employees working under their supervision are allowed to use the pesticide. Already, 584 pesticide products are restricted in Oregon. In other words, much like taking the responsibility for driving a car, taking responsibility for spraying such a potentially dangerous insecticide requires training and a license to ensure safer use.

Yes, you read that correctly. Licensed applicators – who use the insecticides on a regular basis – take classes and pass a state test. As the Oregonian editors stated, home gardeners could get training and a

spray license if they wished, although it's unlikely they will. That hasn't been the trend when other pesticides were restricted. That's because consumers can choose from a large universe of alternative products that are less destructive to humans, pets and pollinators. Restricting pesticides from general consumer use is standard practice to protect the public from dangerous products. In the case of neonicotinoids, a homeowner – even if following the labeling instructions – could apply a rate of poison that is many times greater than the rate legally permitted in commercial operations.

Prudently, Rep. Jeff Reardon, D-Portland, is presenting a reasonable bill to the Oregon Legislature to add neonicotinoids to the existing list of government restricted pesticides. Licensed and trained applicators will still be able to use the products when necessary. The representative's proposal not only protects bees, it also protects billions of dollars in agricultural crops and products provided by bee keepers such as pollination services, honey and beeswax.

Bees are responsible for pollinating one-third of the foods that are grown, sold and consumed. Oregon State University confirms that bees from California and the Pacific Northwest perform nearly half of the nation's commercial pollination, valued at approximately \$18 billion. This economic benefit is in addition to the estimated \$3 billion in annual crops pollinated by undomesticated native bees. The 50,000 bumble bees that perished in Wilsonville this past June were wild and native bees.

Rep. Reardon's cautious approach is also backed by a growing body of scientific evidence about the alarming toxicity of neonicotinoid pesticides. Researchers at Oregon State University and elsewhere find that this class of pesticides has a lengthy, toxic persistence in soil and water.

Our freedoms come with responsibilities when our actions may affect, directly or indirectly, people's welfare and the environment. The responsible person asks what is at risk. Is it the risk of having no more bumble bees and honey bees? Never having an almond or a blueberry to eat? Seeing Oregon's apple and pear industries go into a tailspin? We think that Oregonians want responsible legislation that helps prevent unintended harm and death to the hard working bees that make home gardens and bountiful harvests possible.

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