



Portland considering banning certain insecticides on city property

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Portland is considering banning from use on city-owned property a class of insecticides implicated in widespread bee deaths.

The ban would not apply to private property within the city.

Neonicotinoids, a wide-ranging class of insecticides, are controversial. They remain in the soil for long periods of time and are believed to pose a significant risk to pollinators.

The City Council held a public hearing Wednesday to discuss the proposal. Bee advocates, residents, biologists, conservationists and others overwhelmingly testified in favor of the plan.

Some studies link the insecticides as contributing factors in the wide-scale die-off of bee colonies. In 2013, state officials blamed the high-profile death of tens of thousands of bumblebees in Wilsonville on the insecticide. **Just last month**, state agriculture officials banned using the insecticides on certain trees.

A final City Council vote is expected April 1, but judging by the discussion Wednesday, the proposal is likely to pass. "I think it's appropriate for us to take this kind of action," said Mayor Charlie Hales, citing the city's track record of green policy proposals.

Commissioner Steve Novick said the city doesn't necessarily need a smoking gun linking the insecticides to bee die-offs. "The cautious thing to do is to get rid of them," Novick said.

If approved, Portland would join Eugene, Seattle, Spokane and the U.S. Department of Fish & Wildlife in taking actions to ban the insecticides.

Under the proposed ordinance, city officials wouldn't use or buy neonicotinoids or similar pesticides on city land or in city buildings and would urge stores to label products -- including plants and seeds infused with the common insecticide.

The proposal applies to city contractors as well.

Representatives from the Audubon Society of Portland and Xerces Conservation Society lauded the city for taking a small first step.

Commissioner Amanda Fritz, who oversees the parks bureau, introduced the proposal and agreed the proposal is just a start. "I would love to consider pushing this further," she said.

The proposed ban on **neonicotinoids** and neonicotinoids-like insecticides won't apply immediately to two city rose gardens. Officials say the rose midge, a pest, is difficult to kill without the insecticide. The city will look for an alternative method, using a pilot project at Peninsula Park in North Portland to test alternative non-toxic insecticides. That proposal would be phased in with a deadline of Dec. 2017 to eliminate all neonicotinoid-based products.

Lori Ann Burd, environmental health director for the **Center for Biological Diversity**, said "there's no question" the insecticides are causing significant issues for bees and other wildlife.

Micah Meskel, with **the Audubon Society** of Portland, said he supported the plan, but added that Portland should take a look at how it manages its famous rose gardens. "The idealized image of the perfect rose may be dependent on toxic chemicals," he said.

Not everyone supported the city's action. Scott Dahlman, executive director of Oregonians for Food and Shelter, opposed the city's proposal and criticized previous die-offs as the "terrible situations" where pesticides were misused.

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