

### By Environment News Service

**BRUSSELS, Belgium**, February 1, 2013 (ENS)

<http://ens-newswire.com/2013/02/01/eu-prepares-to-ban-three-pesticides-harmful-to-bees/>

– Three pesticides that harm bees will be banned from application to flowering crops in Europe as of July 1, under new proposals issued by the European Commission.

“This hugely significant EU proposal promises a first, important step on the road to turning around the decline on our bees,” said Friends of the Earth UK, which has been campaigning for a ban on these pesticides.



Honeybee perched on a daisy flower in the garden at La Quinetière, Buais, Normandy, France (Photo by [William Warby](#) )

The three chemicals – clothianidin, imidacloprid and thiamethoxam - known as neonicotinoids, are among the most widely used insecticides in the world. They would be banned for use on corn, oil seed rape, sunflowers and other crops across the European Union for at least two years.

The EU has more than 2,500 species of wild bees, and one species, the honeybee, *Apis mellifera*, which has been domesticated and managed. But throughout Europe there is a severe decline in the numbers of wild bees and other pollinators as well as managed honeybees.

Pollinators contribute at least 22 billion euros each year to European agriculture, with 84

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Written by Joan Russow

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percent of crops needing insect pollination, and more than 80 percent of wild flowers requiring pollinators to reproduce, according to the European Commission.

On January 16, the European Food Safety Authority published three risk assessments on these chemicals, as requested by the European Commission in April 2012.

The risk assessments focused on three main routes of exposure: exposure from residues in nectar and pollen in the flowers of treated plants; exposure from dust produced during the sowing of treated seeds or application of granules; and exposure from residues in guttation fluid produced by treated plants.

While some assessments could not be completed for lack of data, the EFSA concluded that these pesticides should only be applied to crops not attractive to honey bees due to the risk of exposure from pollen, nectar and dust.

At a meeting of EU Agriculture Ministers in Brussels on Monday, European Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy Tonio Borg, announced that considering the EFSA's report on the effects of the three neonicotinoids on bees, he would take "swift and decisive action."

Borg said he was ready to table a "set of ambitious, but proportionate legislative measures."

On Thursday, at a meeting of the Standing Committee on Pesticides, the Commission made five proposals for discussion with governments of the EU's 27 Member States:

1) Amend the conditions of approval of the three pesticides – clothianidin, imidacloprid and thiametoxam – in order to restrict the use only to crops not attractive to bees and to winter cereals, as dust exposure during autumn is not considered a major issue.

2) Prohibit the sale and use of "seeds treated" with plant protection products containing these active substances. This provision will not apply to treated seeds of plants not attractive to bees

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and to treated seeds of winter cereals.

3) Measures 1 and 2 have to be implemented at the latest by July 1, 2013. This will not affect the forthcoming sowing season for corn.

4) Review both measures by the Commission after two years.

5) Restrict the use of these chemicals to professionals, prohibit sales for amateur uses.

“Protecting the health of our bee population is of great importance not only for our European agricultural sector but also for our ecosystem and environment as a whole,” said Borg,



Wild honeybees build a hive in a garden near Milan, Italy. (Photo by [La Lince](#) )

The next step will happen on February 7 when the Commission will meet the Advisory group of the Food Chain (which includes stakeholders such as agriculture associations and industry, as well as NGOs) to discuss the actions proposed by the Commission.

On February 25 a committee of experts from all EU countries will vote on the proposals.

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Borg's office said these measures are being proposed in response to "a significant amount of requests from concerned citizens" about keeping European bees safe from pesticides.

Environmental groups praised the proposals but said did not go far enough. "It will surely improve honeybees' health across Europe," said Pesticide Action Network Europe, but "this is not enough to protect bees and the environment."

"Nineteen years after the first massive honeybee colony losses reported by beekeepers on imidacloprid-treated sunflower crops in France, the European Commission finally declared its intention to move concerning neonicotinoids. Pesticide Action Network Europe welcomes this big step in the good direction and this acknowledgment of the work carried out for many years by beekeepers organizations and environmentalist NGOs."

"The EFSA reports stated that one of the risks linked to neonicotinoids is based on dust production during sowing of the coated seeds. This risk is present for all crops, not only bee-attractive ones," PAN-Europe said.

The group warns that bees can be contaminated by toxic dust, or the contaminated dust can pollute other crops, soils, surface water or wild flowers.

And, the group says the Commission's proposals do not protect bumblebees.

"EFSA states that risk posed by neonicotinoids on bumblebees and the environment is not well known," said PAN-Europe. But the group points to studies that show "these chemicals have also harmful effects on bumblebees."

Maintaining the authorization to use neonicotinoids on crops such as potatoes will continue to harm bumblebees who feed on potatoes' pollen, the group warns.

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Also, the group points out, “soils contaminated by granules of neonicotinoids one year can host bee-attractive crops the second year, and EFSA acknowledges there is an unknown risk to bees that Commission does not take into account in its proposal.”

PAN-Europe is asking the Commission to propose a full ban on neonicotinoids to protect honeybees and other essential insects, by applying the precautionary principle, as is provided in pesticide regulation 1107/2009.

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