Assembly Passes Bill to Protect Pollinators, Ecosystems, and People from Harmful Pesticides

AB 2146 would prohibit most outdoor, non-agricultural uses of neonicotinoid insecticides

Sacramento, CA- The California State Assembly voted 45-14 to pass AB 2146, a bill authored by Assemblymember Rebecca Bauer-Kahan that would restrict most outdoor, non-agricultural uses of neonicotinoid insecticides, or “neonics.” A large and growing body of evidence identifies neonics as a leading cause of widespread pollinator declines and also links widespread neonic contamination with mass bird losses, aquatic ecosystem collapse, and risks to human health.

“Bees are the backbone of our state’s ecosystem” said the author, Assemblymember Bauer-Kahan (D-Orinda), “California is far behind other states and countries in limiting these highly toxic chemicals. We must address the home and garden uses that seriously threaten ecological and human health.”

California beekeepers lost 41.9% of their honey bee colonies last year, the second worst annual loss on record. But European honeybees aren’t the only ones in peril; California is home to over 1,600 native bee species, many of which are also struggling. These and other insect pollinators are critical to California’s agricultural economy, helping to pollinate crops worth upwards of $11 billion annually.

“Today's vote brings California one step closer to being a national leader in addressing harmful neonic contamination,” said Lucas Rhoads, a staff attorney at NRDC (Natural Resources Defense Council). “This bill benefits everyone—our struggling pollinators, Californians who care about clean water and healthy ecosystems, and farmers who depend on pollinators to grow their crops. Assemblymember Bauer-Kahan’s leadership made it possible and we look forward to our continued work together to ensure that this urgently needed bill passes the full legislature as soon as possible.”

Neonics are extraordinarily toxic to insects—just one square foot of grass treated with a typical neonic lawn product at approved levels can contain enough neonics to kill one million bees. Neonics can also remain in soil for years and move easily through the environment in irrigation
or rainwater. As a result, they broadly contaminate California’s environment; state water testing found neonic in 92% of surface water samples in urban areas of Southern California.

“The damage inflicted by neonic is far greater than the fleeting value they purport to offer,” said Laura Deehan, Environment California state director. “A perfectly manicured lawn or rose garden isn’t worth the destruction of our bee populations, which are vital to our environment and our food systems. Passing this bill is so meaningful because it ups the odds that California’s meadows and gardens continue to buzz with the sound of bees.”

Widespread neonic contamination also threatens more than bees. Neonic contamination has been linked with mass losses of birds, about 30% of which have disappeared in the past 50 years. They have also been linked with the collapse of fisheries and a variety of other harms to wildlife—including birth defects in deer.

“Each one of us depends on the vital relationship between our plants and pollinators, and AB 2146 is a much-needed step toward protecting the integrity of that interplay,” said Andrea Williams, director of Biodiversity Initiatives for the California Native Plant Society. “We're grateful to Asm. Bauer-Kahan for her leadership on this important legislation and thrilled to see it moving forward.”

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, half the U.S. population is exposed to neonic on a regular basis—a concerning statistic given that studies suggest that neonic may increase risk of developmental or neurological damage in humans, including malformations of the developing heart and brain, memory loss, and finger tremors.

AB 2146, co-sponsored by NRDC, Environment California, and the California Native Plant Society, would prohibit most outdoor, non-agricultural uses of the five major neonic, while allowing certain treatments, like those to combat invasive species. The bill now advances to the California State Senate.

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The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) is an international nonprofit environmental organization with more than 3 million members and online activists. Since 1970, our lawyers, scientists, and other environmental specialists have worked to protect the world's natural resources, public health, and the environment. NRDC has offices in New York City; Washington, D.C.; Los Angeles; San Francisco; Chicago; Bozeman, Montana; and Beijing. Visit us at www.nrdc.org and follow us on Twitter @NRDC

California Native Plant Society (“CNPS”), is a non-profit environmental organization with more than 11,000 members in 35 Chapters across California and Baja California, Mexico. CNPS’s mission is to protect California’s native plant heritage and preserve it for future generations through the application of science, research, education, and conservation. We work closely with decision-makers, scientists, and local planners to advocate for well-informed policies, regulations, and land management practices. Learn more at www.cnps.org and @cnps on Twitter.

Environment California works for clean air, clean water, clean energy, wildlife and open spaces, and a livable climate. Our members across the state put grassroots support behind our research and advocacy.