



I UCN Task Force on Systemic Pesticides

There are strong indications that the widespread use of neonicotinoids is the cause of the worldwide decline in honey bees, bumblebees, and butterflies. Applied as seed dressing, this family of pesticides disperses throughout the plant's tissue to provide long-term protection from insects. The neurotoxin is also present in the plant's nectar and pollen, which leads to its unintentional introduction into bee colonies. In some countries, the use of neonicotinoids has already been partially banned because of the risk to honey bees. The task force's investigation is expected to demonstrate how damaging the pesticide's use is, not only to our planet's insect kingdom but also potentially to humans.

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“Existing research into the effects of neonicotinoids is fragmented,” says Jeroen van der Sluijs, the task force’s scientific co-chair. “That’s why we’ve put together a global task force of thirty-eight researchers from thirteen countries. For the first time, bee researchers, biologists, aquatic ecologists, chemists, risk researchers, crop protection researchers, and statisticians are working together internationally to synthesize the available knowledge on this topic. Honey bees, solitary bees, bumblebees, butterflies, and beetles all come into contact with the neonicotinoid residue in plants. But soil life is also in danger – think of earthworms. The poison persists in the environment and eventually washes into the ocean. There, it damages mussel and oyster larvae and all kinds of organisms that coastal birds feed on. Our research should produce a picture of the total impact neonicotinoids have on the ecosystem. We’re also investigating the dangers to human health.”

Van der Sluijs says this collation of existing research would not have gotten off the ground without Adessium Foundation’s contribution. He expects to publish the first findings at the end of 2013. “In addition to looking at the health effects, we’re also researching the alternatives and whether there are shortcomings in the European procedures for approving pesticides. If our research shows that the use of neonicotinoids is too damaging, our report will provide an immediate foundation for addressing the problem.”

* www.bijensterfte.nl

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The IUCN Task Force on Systemic Pesticides is conducting scientific research into the impact of neonicotinoids, a family of pesticides widely used in the agricultural industry. There are signs that systemic pesticides kill pollinating insects. A lack of wild plant and crop pollination damages both our ecological system and the agricultural sector. There are also indications that the pesticides are harmful to humans, particularly to developing brains.