

DEC Announces Actions to Protect New York's Pollinators by Restricting Use of 'Neonic' Pesticides

New Requirement for Neonicotinoids Will Help Prevent Potentially Harmful Exposure to Honeybees and Other Beneficial Insects

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Commissioner Basil Seggos announced actions to limit the unrestricted use of pesticides that can harm bee and other pollinator populations. DEC is reclassifying certain products containing the neonicotinoid (neonic) insecticides imidacloprid, thiamethoxam, and acetamiprid as "restricted use" to ensure applications are limited to trained pesticide applicators in specific situations. Restricting the use of these pesticides enables DEC to collect new data to determine where, when, and how they are used, as well as their potential impacts.

"Protecting pollinators is a top priority, and today's action to restrict the use of these neonicotinoid pesticides is another important step in our ongoing efforts to safeguard these species that are crucial to New York's environment, agricultural economy, and biodiversity," Commissioner Seggos said. "Reclassifying these pesticides will ensure they are only used in targeted instances by qualified professional applicators, and only available for sale to certified applicators which will further protect public health and the environment."

New York is committed to promoting the health and recovery of pollinator populations, as highlighted in the State's Pollinator Protection Plan (<https://agriculture.ny.gov/system/files/documents/2021/02/pollinatorreport.pdf>). Pollinators contribute substantially to New York's environment and economy. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, pollinators provide approximately \$344 million worth of pollination services to New York and add \$29 billion in value to crop production nationally each year. The state's ability to produce crops such as apples, grapes, cherries, onions, pumpkins, and cauliflower relies heavily on the presence of pollinators.

Pesticides represent one of many factors that stress pollinators, and neonicotinoids in particular have been identified as a group of pesticides that, in general, are highly toxic to pollinators. While commercial application of all pesticides is reported to DEC as part of the State's stringent regulatory oversight, residential applications and sales of general use products to consumers are not. The reclassification ensures proper use by trained applicators and enables DEC to collect sales and use data to estimate and monitor the quantities and locations where these products are used.

The reclassification will take effect on Jan. 1, 2023, allowing time for registrants, distributors, and retailers to prepare for the change in classification. Neonics will be reclassified under DEC's pesticide regulation authority and pesticide registrants have been notified of the intent to reclassify the applicable products. Products labeled for "limited directed application" to tree trunks and the ground at the base of trees, shrubs, and plants are not included in the reclassification. These products provide cost-effective and unique pest control for residential applications, particularly for invasive species, and limit potential exposure to pollinators.

"Getting 'over-the-counter' neonic products off store shelves marks an important first step in reining in widespread neonic contamination, which we see in New York State's water and in record yearly losses of bees," said Dan Raichel, Acting Director of Natural Resources Defense Council's Pollinator Initiative. "We look forward to continued work with the DEC on even more protections for people and pollinators from these neurotoxic pesticides."

“Reclassifying the neonic insecticides imidacloprid, thiamethoxam, and acetamiprid as ‘restricted use’ takes these dangerous pollinator-killers out of circulation for the everyday consumer and helps to curb their misuse and overuse,” said Caitlin Ferrante, Conservation Program Manager, Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter. “The Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter commends Governor Hochul and DEC for this important action to help reverse the pollinator crisis and we hope today’s announcement will lead to further restrictions of this dangerous insecticide, and recovery of plummeting bird and insect populations.”

“Over the last decade, neonics have come under increasing scrutiny because of their impacts on pollinators—but new evidence demonstrates that these chemicals are harming an even wider range of wildlife,” said Erin McGrath, Policy Manager for Audubon New York. “Exposure to neonics can prevent songbirds from orienting themselves for their migration, cause significant weight loss, and interfere with their reproductive success. We thank Governor Hochul and DEC for taking action to curtail the unrestricted use of neonic pesticides in consumer products, which will help protect birds and the places they need.”

For more information about DEC’s pesticides program visit: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/298.html>