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Reports of industry interference in pesticide decision must be investigated

Leading environmental groups call for independent review of controversial "neonic" decision

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— Following reports in the *National Observer* that Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency allegedly "colluded" with Bayer Crop Science to maintain registration of the controversial neonicotinoid pesticide imidacloprid, 12 environmental and health organizations are calling on Canada's health minister to intervene.

The groups, backed by several university scientists, [sent a letter](#) to Health Minister Mark Holland on Friday, asking him to put safeguards in place to ensure that impartial PMRA scientists can do their job in service of the public interest and prevent inappropriate industry influence in pesticide regulation.

Imidacloprid is a neonicotinoid insecticide, a class of chemicals linked to global pollinator decline and loss of insect biodiversity. The insecticide has been banned in the European Union since 2018.

Quotes:

"It looks like Bayer pushed the federal regulator to ignore data inconvenient to its interests," said **Lisa Gue, national policy manager at the David Suzuki Foundation**. "We need the health minister to send a clear signal that this is not acceptable, and order an independent review of the environmental harms from neonic insecticides."

"As a physician, it alarms me that a government regulator could be ignoring evidence. Health Canada must ensure its decision-making aligns with the protection of people and the planet, not those of corporations whose priorities stand in contrast with the public interest," said **Dr. Melissa Lem, a family physician and President of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment**. "We need robust decision-making that protects our health and environmental rights. An independent review of neonicotinoid decisions and a realignment within the PMRA moves us in the right direction."

"The confidence in the current assessment framework on pesticides has been severely weakened with the knowledge that the full scope of science is not fully considered in the decision making process." states **Theresa McClenaghan, Executive Director and Counsel, Canadian Environmental Law Association**. "Evaluators and decision makers of pesticides should be required to justify in a very transparent manner why specific studies are rejected or not accepted for evaluation."

“Canada’s federal government needs to stand up for independent science and shield it from corporate meddling, especially when our food security and pollinators depend on it,” said **Cassie Barker, Senior Program Manager, Toxics, Environmental Defence**. “It’s a massive conflict of interest to have corporate actors, like Bayer, seemingly so embedded in the decision-making process. The feds need to tell pesticide manufacturers to buzz off before we all get stung.”

“PMRA’s alleged “collusion” with Bayer Crop Science to reverse a draft decision to ban the longest-used neonic, imidacloprid, throws deep suspicion on a decade of reviews and re-evaluations of the three neonic pesticides imidacloprid, thiamethoxam and clothianidin widely used in Canada,” said **Beatrice Olivastri, CEO, Friends of the Earth Canada**. “As a first step to earning any confidence from the public, PMRA should immediately authorize an independent review panel to assess the environmental and health aspects of all three neonics.”

"The breach of scientific and regulatory principles by PMRA is both blatant and egregious" , said **Mary Lou McDonald of SafeFoodMatters.org**. "PMRA is supposed to judge the evidence, not help create it. We call for an end to this ongoing capture of PMRA."

"By hiding worrying test results at Bayer's request, Health Canada is going against its mandate to protect the health of Canadians. It's disturbing to see scandal after scandal demonstrating the close links between agrochemical corporations and our institutions," **stated Thibault Rehn, coordinator of Vigilance OGM**.

“The Health Minister must act swiftly to rectify the regulation of imidacloprid to protect us from its significant health harms including neurotoxicity, reproductive anomalies, hepatic and renal damage, and breast cancer. We should be able to depend on our government to prioritize our right to a healthy environment instead of siding with the interests of multinational corporations,” said **Milena Gioia, Coordinator of Education and Advocacy at Breast Cancer Action Quebec**

“Canadians need assurance that Health Canada’s Pesticide Management Regulatory Agency is operating in the best interest of Canadians, sustainable agriculture, and the environment, not simply serving the best interest of the pesticide industry. Moreover, PMRA scientists should be adequately supported to do their jobs without impacts from industry influence in pesticide regulation. The Minister’s appointment of an independent review panel to examine the decisions that led to the reversal of the ban on neonicotinoids would signal an expectation of transparency in this public institution,” said **Carolyn Callaghan, senior conservation biologist at the Canadian Wildlife Federation**.

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Notes to editor:

- Canada’s most recent re-evaluation of imidacloprid initially concluded that the chemical was present in water samples at levels harmful to aquatic insects. The PMRA proposed to

end its use in agriculture to protect aquatic ecosystems but later backtracked on the proposed ban. The 2021 final evaluation decision concluded risks were “acceptable.”

- A formal objection to the 2021 decision now claims that water sampling data showing higher concentrations of imidacloprid may have been selectively excluded in the final assessment — at the request of the registrant (Bayer Crop Science) — to favour continued registration of Bayer’s imidacloprid products.
- Under federal pesticide law, the health minister may establish an independent panel to review decisions when there is scientific doubt about the validity of the risk assessment on which the decision was based.
- Read the letter to Health Minister Mark Holland [here](#).

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