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Ontario Bee Incidents 2012 - Update

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This spring, beginning in April 2012, incidents of bee mortality were reported by beekeepers across southern Ontario. Timing and location of these incidents appears to have generally coincided with corn planting. Health Canada's Pest Management Regulatory Agency (PMRA) has been working with the Ontario Ministry of the Environment (MOE) and the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs (OMAFRA) to evaluate the role pesticides may have played in these bee losses. Initial analyses of the circumstances surrounding the bee losses indicate that there was no pesticide misuse.

Samples of affected bees were taken at many incident locations and are being analyzed for specific pesticide residues by the PMRA laboratory services. To date, residue analysis has been completed for 104 bee samples, as well as some samples of pollen and vegetation. Analysis is currently underway for an additional set of bee samples. Preliminary residue results show that insecticides used to treat corn seed were detected in approximately 70% of the dead bee samples analyzed.

Based on the preliminary information evaluated to date, there is an indication that pesticides used on treated corn seeds may have contributed to at least some of the 2012 spring bee losses that occurred in Ontario, however, there is still additional information being collected for consideration and final conclusions have not been made. We are looking closely at the specific circumstances that may have contributed to the unusual number of bee mortalities this spring.

The PMRA (assisted by MOE) is continuing to gather information for the purpose of determining the role pesticides may have played in the bee losses, how exposure occurred, and to determine what steps can be taken to prevent future bee losses. Information is being collected from affected bee yard owners/operators to help in the evaluation. Furthermore, the PMRA and MOE staff are contacting owners/operators of agricultural land in the vicinity of certain affected bee yards to collect details on agricultural activities including: crops grown, seeding dates, seed treatments, planting equipment, planting practices used, pesticide applications, weather conditions at the time of planting and other factors that may have played a role in the bee losses.

Once all current samples have been analyzed and available details gathered from the affected bee yards and adjacent agricultural land owners, a final analysis of the results will be conducted. A report will be made available, which will include information on the findings of the evaluation as well as the PMRA's final conclusions.

In the interim, the PMRA will take additional steps to further protect pollinators from potential pesticide exposure, and is working with the United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) and other Canadian and international regulatory partners towards this goal. Work is ongoing to ensure that additional safety measures and best management practices to reduce pollinator exposure to treated seed dust are developed and communicated to beekeepers, agricultural producers and other stakeholders prior to the next planting season.