

Agri-Business / Cropland. Insecticide Applicators need to be Mindful of Bees (Friday 07/09/2010 4:00PM)

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HELENA, Mont. -- The Montana Department of Agriculture reminds pesticide users that summer blooms attract bees and it is illegal to apply most insecticide products when bees are present in or near a crop.

Federally-approved pesticide labels are the law when it comes to using pesticides, says Patricia Denke, Pest Management Program manager. Links on the department's website at <http://agr.mt.gov/crops/Bees/Apiary.asp> provide information on protecting bees and locating hives in the vicinity of intended pesticide applications. Guidelines for protecting bees from insecticides were developed by the department after consultation with both beekeepers and pesticide applicators.

Monitoring crop insect development, making plans ahead of time and considering alternatives are key for protecting pollinators, says Amy Bamber, Technical Services Bureau chief for the department. In some cases, landowners might choose to harvest a hay crop early, for example. Insecticide baits might be used for insects such as grasshoppers to avoid chemical contact with pollinators. Some newer formulations designated by the EPA as reduced-risk may pose fewer risks towards bees while managing pests.

Applicators may also avoid injuring local bee colonies by applying many permethrin or pyrethroid insecticides when bees are inactive (in early morning or late evening), says Cecil Tharp, MSU Pesticide Education Specialist. Care should be taken not to apply these pesticides when a heavy dew exists as pesticide will remain toxic towards bees until dew has dried from the field.

Precautionary statements on the pesticide product label will explain the hazards a pesticide inherently will pose towards bees and steps you may take to mitigate the potential threat. These have the force of law, and ignoring the instructions can make applicators liable for damage to honeybee colonies.

Communication between beekeepers and applicators is essential, Denke says. Conflicts sometimes arise when new owners or renters take over bee locations or crop land and are unaware of existing agreements.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION: Visit the Montana Department of Agriculture's website at www.agr.mt.gov or contact Ian Foley (406-444-9430, agr@mt.gov), Amy Bamber at (406-444-5400, agr@mt.gov), or Cecil Tharp (406-994-5067, csharp@montana.edu).