Neonics Battle Looms Large

On Wednesday, Feb. 10, the state of Maryland’s House Environment and Transportation Committee held a meeting to hear public comment on legislation to restrict the availability of neonicotinoid pesticides (neonics) from retail sale. The proposed measure would also require signage to indicate whether plants or seed had been treated with neonics prior to distribution.

Proponents for the bill, led by Beyond Pesticides, testified that neonics were the primary cause of colony collapse disorder, a phenomenon where a majority of worker bees abandon the hive, and made claims that a preponderance of scientific research supported that conclusion. At the hearing, commercial bee keepers claimed over 60 percent of their hives were lost to colony collapse in 2015.

Landscape professionals and other industry allies countered that premise, and instead pointed to scientific evidence that the parasites and pests, primarily the varroa mite, were the true culprits. Industry testimony was also supported by the Maryland Department of Agriculture whose representative stated that their research and surveys showed that varroa mite infestation and growth was devastating to the honey bee population. The department identified changing habitat and nutritional deficiencies as further contributing to the problem. However, in studies of hives and bee bread (pollen collections kept in the hive) they found traces of neonics in only three samples and all three were well below the sub-lethal level.

NALP will continue to work vigilantly with our allies in opposition to measures that ban or restrict pesticide and fertilizer use. We are currently monitoring measures in numerous states and localities and will work to ensure that the voice of landscape professionals is represented when issues that could impact the profession are under consideration.

For further information on the 2016 NALP advocacy agenda contact Paul Mendelsohn, NALP vice president of government relations.