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THE BUFFALO NEWS

Another Voice: An insecticide threatens the next silent spring

By *Another Voice* (<http://buffalonews.com/author/another-voice/>) | Published April 1, 2018

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By Laurel Hopwood

A groundbreaking new study exposes a huge threat to the Great Lakes. Neonicotinoid insecticides (neonics) have been found year-round in major tributaries to the Great Lakes. Of great concern in New York is the Genesee River.

Neonics came on the market with great expectation that it caused less toxicity than previously used classes of insecticides. Unfortunately, there's a dark side.

Neonics have already been linked with bee die-offs and bird population decline. Why should we care? Losing these pollinators can

have a tremendous impact on our food supply. Birds are natural predators of insects carrying disease. The entire ecosystem may be at risk.

Consider water fleas. Not something to chat about at the dinner table. Yet these small aquatic creatures are at risk from neonic exposure and they are an important part of the aquatic food chain.

Neonics are the most widely used class of insecticides in the world. They are slow to break down and therefore persist in the environment. They have been found in dust, soil, wetlands, groundwater and foods common to the American diet. The USDA found neonics in 12 of 19 different fruits and vegetables sampled. Unlike most other pesticides, neonics cannot be washed off of food prior to consumption. Open your window in the summer and dust particles carrying the toxin will most probably enter your living space.

Neonics have been detected in human urine, serum and hair. A distinct concern of human neonic toxicity is a questionable exposure link with Alzheimer's disease and autism. Yet studies are scant linking neonic exposure to human health dysfunction. Meanwhile, the widespread use of neonics in agriculture and urban lawns and gardens is increasing like a runaway train without brakes.

The ecological reviews of neonics are inadequate. EPA registration is based primarily on the data submitted by the companies manufacturing their proprietary pesticides. That's not all. The EPA has failed to assess cumulative, synergistic, and repetitive long-term effects.

Colorado beekeeper Tom Theobald exclaimed, “Neonic seed coatings are exempt from regulation by the EPA, yet the primary neonic applications are used as seed coatings for corn and soybeans. The EPA has excluded this use under the Treated Articles Exclusion – which says that seed treatment is not a pesticide use. It’s outrageous that this has gone unchallenged.”

Dust off your history books. Fifty-six years ago, Rachel Carson authored “Silent Spring” not only to expose the ill effects of DDT, but also to expose how chemistry can disrupt the natural systems.

Many scientists claim neonics are leading to the next silent spring. Will we pay attention now, before it’s too late?

Michelle Hladik, Ph. D., lead author of this new study has raised a red flag. Now it’s our turn. We can continue to follow the status quo, or we can move forward in a win-win situation for farmers, the ecosystem and the American public. Legislatures can provide economic and

educational incentives for farmers to plant organically. Each person can assume personal responsibility by choosing organic lawns, gardens and sustainably grown food.

Laurel Hopwood is a member of the Sierra Club Pollinator Protection Team in Cleveland.

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