

WRITTEN QUESTION E-3670/08  
by Astrid Lulling (PPE-DE)  
to the Commission

Subject: Seeds treated with clothianidin allegedly responsible for mass deaths of bees

According to scientific studies conducted by the Julius Kühn Institute in Braunschweig, the active agent clothianidin, used as a plant-protection product in the treatment of seeds, is responsible for the mass deaths of bees currently being observed, for example along the River Rhine. An analysis of the results of these studies has clearly shown that bees are being poisoned by the active agent in the plant-protection product, clothianidin, which rubs off on to their bodies. In early spring, French veterinary authorities warned beekeepers not to release their swarms in areas in which clothianidin, which attacks the nervous system, has been used.

Can the current mass deaths of bees be traced back exclusively to a production fault involving seed treated with clothianidin? It has been reported that the adhesive needed to bind clothianidin to seeds was mistakenly omitted during the treatment of batches of maize seeds.

Is it the case that clothianidin is highly soluble in water and therefore, despite crop rotation, builds up in the soil in ever higher concentrations, particularly in hollows?

How quickly does clothianidin break down in the soil and how long must bees be kept away from contaminated areas until the deadly effect of the chemical has dissipated?

How high would the income losses suffered by farmers be should it prove necessary to close off large areas to bees or should the mass deaths of bees continue at their current rate in many parts of Europe?

In the circumstances, and given the damage it has been shown to cause, should approval for clothianidin not now be withdrawn?

What measures does the Commission plan to take in order to address the problem of mass deaths of bees, a phenomenon which poses a serious danger to plants and people and one which the author raised in questions to the Commission in 2003 and 2005?