Preventing pesticides in veterinary medicines for dogs and cats from damaging the environment

An open letter to the UK Government

November 2023

Pesticides used in veterinary medicines for dogs and cats are leaching into the natural environment. A single dose on a large dog of the neonicotinoid imidacloprid – commonly found in tick and flea treatments – is enough to kill millions of honeybees. Environment Agency data shows that pesticides used in veterinary medicines are present in many of England's rivers in concentrations that exceed accepted safe limits, posing a high risk to aquatic ecosystems.

Significant contributors to this environmental contamination are five pesticide active substances that are not allowed to be used on agricultural crops due to their impact on human health and/or the environment. The five chemicals are detailed in the table below. They include:

- all five are highly toxic to bees (including a recently banned and controversial neonicotinoid)
- two that contaminate groundwater
- two that have links to cancer
- two suspected endocrine disrupters

Yet, despite the fact that alternatives are available, these chemicals continue to be used widely in medicines for dogs and cats, often prophylactically and without prescription. This is undermining efforts to reduce chemical pollution in the environment which, studies have shown, threatens the stability of global ecosystems.

We the undersigned call on the UK Government to:

- Ban all pesticide active substances that are not permitted for use on agricultural crops from being included in veterinary medicines for dogs and cats.
- Close the current loophole to ensure that any pesticide active substance deemed to be too harmful to be used on crops in the future is automatically banned from appearing in veterinary medicines.

What are the five active substances that we are calling for to be banned from use in medicines for dogs and cats?

Active Substance **(All insecticides)**	**Approved in UK for use on agricultural crops?**	**Environmental impacts**	**Human health impacts**	**Used in which type of veterinary medicines and on which animals?**	**No of parasiticide products for cats and dogs containing active substance**
Dinotefuran (neonicotinoid)	Never approved	• Highly toxic to bees		Ectoparaciticide Dogs, cats	12
Fipronil	No products ever approved	• Highly toxic to bees • Ground water contaminant	• Carcinogen • Endocrine disruptor	Ectoparaciticide and endectocide Dogs, cats	483
Imidacloprid (neonicotinoid)	Banned in 2018	• Highly toxic to bees • Ground water contaminant		Ectoparaciticide and endectocide Dogs, cats	176
Nitenpyram (neonicotinoid)	Never approved	• Highly toxic to bees		Ectoparaciticide Dogs, cats	9
Permethrin	Banned in 2002	• Highly toxic to bees	• Carcinogen • Endocrine disruptor	Ectoparaciticide Dogs, cats	90