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By Julie Deardorff

Air pollution hurts a flower's fragrance, bees

Originally posted: April 22, 2008

Air pollution might be part of the reason why wild populations of some pollinators are declining in several areas of the world.

Humans aren't the only ones suffering from air pollution created by power plants and cars. Smog is destroying the aroma of flowers, which, in turn, makes it hard for pollinators to locate the flowering plants, according to a University of Virginia study.

Bees, which need nectar for food, are the principal pollinators for 80 percent of the world's grains, fruits, vegetables and legumes, including about 90 crops in North America, a value of about \$14 billion.

But if they can't find enough food to sustain their populations, then the flowering plants don't get pollinated sufficiently to proliferate and diversify.

So what are we doing about this?

Not as much as we could, says Brian Urbaszewski, Director of Environmental Health Program of the Respiratory Health Association of Metropolitan Chicago.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's own scientific advisers just slammed the agency's new tighter health standard for ozone smog pollution as STILL being too lax to actually protect public health as required under the Clean Air Act, according to news reports.

The new standard means "we're likely to see a lot more unhealthy air pollution days this summer," Urbaszewski said. Last summer we had eight unhealthy days due to ozone. Using the new (but still weak) EPA ozone standard, we would have seen 18 ozone alert days.

"Last summer, people were only getting the message that the air was unhealthy less than half the time it actually was unhealthy, at least unhealthy according to EPA. But if you used the ozone standard the public health and medical community were supporting, you would have seen OVER 50 unhealthy air days last summer in Chicagoland," Urbaszewski said.

Meanwhile, there is legislation in Springfield (HB 3424) that could cut ozone smog-forming air pollution by 10 to 15 percent and save \$1 billion a year for Illinois, Urbaszewski said.

Not surprisingly, the auto industry is opposing it.

Ah, breathe deep.