

## Viewpoint: Evidence or ‘junk science’—Will the Biden Administration ban essential pesticides experts say are safe?



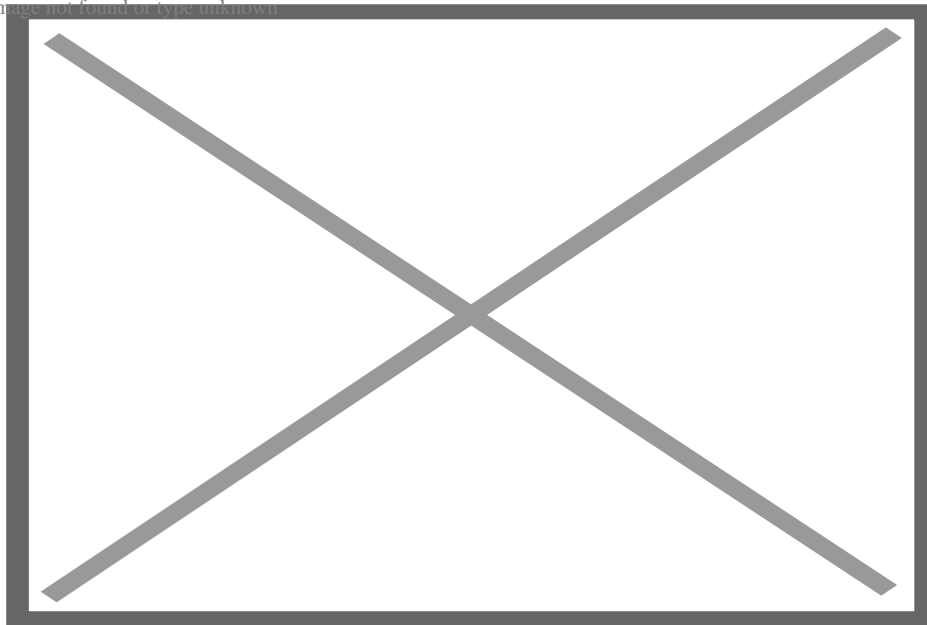
Within days of being sworn in, President Joe Biden elevated the science adviser to the president to Cabinet rank, with a seat beside the secretaries of State, Defense and Treasury. This bold move signaled the administration’s commitment to an evidence-based approach to policymaking.

Yet some are already hoping to undermine this forward-thinking policy.

Activist groups are demanding the administration replace evidence-based research with activist-backed junk science. The Environmental Working Group (EWG), among others, is [demanding a ban on 11 critical pesticides that farmers have relied on to feed the public during the COVID-19 pandemic.](#)

These are all products that have been thoroughly evaluated by career scientists at U.S. regulatory agencies numerous times, under both Democratic and Republican administrations. They are safe. And they are essential to keeping food affordable at a time when people need that.

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Eric Lander, Biden’s top science advisor. Credit: Alex Wong/Getty Images

### Will the Biden administration follow empirical evidence, or junk science?

This new activist push is built around an assertion that insects are on a one-way trip to mass extinction. “[The Insect Apocalypse is Here](#)” shrieked a New York Times headline, which even rhetorically asked, “What does it mean for the rest of life on Earth?” Business Insider used the claim of an activist ecologist to

write that, “[More than 50% of insects have disappeared since 1970](#)” while National Geographic followed with, “[Where have all the insects gone?](#)”



They haven't gone anywhere. Insects are not in decline.

Sensational assertions follow a well-worn pattern. Just a few years ago, similar marketing campaigns insisted that honeybees were doomed. They cited estimates that bees were “dying globally at an alarming rate” — even manufacturing a “40% decline” in the space of a few months. That claim, which was repeated so often it became a [popular Internet meme](#), fizzled when scientists pointed out that the U.S. Department of Agriculture keeps close tabs on honeybee numbers because they are involved in billions of dollars in crops. Far from declining, bee numbers have risen since the advent of the pesticide EWG said we needed to ban to save them. With [2.8 million bee colonies in 2019](#), numbers are up [8% from two decades ago](#).

### **We shouldn't make science decisions using 'bug splatter' estimates**

The papers being touted when writing provocative headlines about the insect apocalypse don't hold up under scientific scrutiny. One had 700 environmental volunteers self-report how many insects hit their front license plate. They used that to claim “splat density” had dropped 50% from 0.2 “splats per mile” to 0.1 splats — [and pesticides were the reason](#).

Yet what environmentalists sounding the alarm about those Kent Wildlife Trust estimates left out of their press releases was that Kent has seen a 15% population growth in the same period. 2019 alone had an extra 48,000 homes. New homes are near roads, and roads are where fewer bug splats were detected on cars. If fewer insects are found, it is due to more housing and more aerodynamic cars, not pesticides and food production.

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Provocative claims will always mobilize scientists who care about the environment and [University of Georgia researchers](#) used controlled monitoring sites, rather than estimates from environmentalists driving around their neighborhoods, to try and replicate the results. Their more scientific approach found the purported "decline" was instead "indistinguishable from zero."

Doomsday prophecies have been with us forever. In 1907, people were told that Halley's Comet was going to kill us all. Hucksters even sold comet pills "for complete protection from the noxious gases emitted by Haley's Comet."

The Biden administration should not buy what similar hucksters are selling today.

**Hank Campbell is the founder of Science 2.0, a pro-science nonprofit whose articles have been read directly by over 300 million people and tens of millions more in syndication. Find Hank on Twitter [@HankCampbell](#)**

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