

Why Did the EPA Delay Its Glyphosate Safety Report?



By Julie Kelly — October 21, 2016



Credit: Shutterstock [1]

The Environmental Protection Agency is punting a final decision on the safety of the controversial weedkiller glyphosate to the next administration.

Since 2009, the agency has been conducting a registration review of glyphosate, one of the world most widely-used herbicides, and evaluating any risk to human and environmental health, an assessment required every 15 years.

The lengthy process has been fraught with delays, accusations of political maneuvering and even Congressional investigations.

Under [questioning](#) [2] by the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee in June, EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy assured lawmakers the review would be finished this fall. But in their latest stall tactic – despite two internal reports concluding glyphosate does not cause cancer - the EPA [postponed](#) [3] the meeting of a Scientific Advisory Panel this week to yet again evaluate its carcinogenicity. In a statement, the agency said “due to changes in the availability of experts for the peer review panel...the meeting on glyphosate is being postponed to later in 2016.”

House Science Committee Chairman Lamar Smith, a leading critic of the EPA, blasted back: “It is inexcusable that EPA continues to delay its review of glyphosate.” Amid valid concerns the EPA might be trying to influence the outcome, Smith said “The unwillingness of the agency to move forward with this analysis may be an attempt to pack the panel with individuals who have a pre-determined agenda or bias not based in sound science.”

Glyphosate - used on farms, public spaces and home gardens in more than 160 countries - is a

proxy in the battle against genetically engineered crops because many rely on glyphosate use. It's sold under the brand name Roundup by Monsanto, the sworn enemy of the anti-GMO movement (the company also develops and sells genetically modified seed). Since the science confirms GMO crops are safe, environmentalists who oppose GMOs have turned their attention to glyphosate and are trying hard to promote the narrative that it's unsafe and causes cancer. It's becoming clear the current EPA does not want to take any responsibility for exonerating glyphosate and undermining the *raison d'être* of these activists.

That's why lawmakers have reason to believe politics is at play in the EPA's continued delays and some of their actions have raised eyebrows. In September 2015, the EPA's cancer committee deemed glyphosate non-carcinogenic, finding no association between glyphosate exposure and a number of cancers including brain, prostate, lung and leukemia. Seven months later, on April 29, 2016, the committee's [report](#) [4] was posted online. It was removed a few days later after the EPA said it had been posted "inadvertently."

That prompted Smith to [demand](#) [5] all emails and communications about the report (the agency has not yet fulfilled that request). In a letter to the EPA in July, Senator James Inhofe, chairman of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, also asked for internal documents from the EPA over concern "EPA employees have suggested that public pressure is playing a role in the Agency's...regulation of pesticides" and that the EPA was "seemingly under pressure to come to a certain conclusion....on glyphosate."

Another [report](#) [6], released on September 16 by the EPA's Office of Pesticide Programs, also said glyphosate is "not likely to be carcinogenic to humans." The 227-page report echoes the findings reached by other international bodies including the European Food Safety Authority, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization and agencies in Germany, Canada and New Zealand. "We are glad to see the EPA released its assessment that reaffirmed the outstanding safety of glyphosate and the conclusion of not likely to be carcinogenic," said Robert Fraley, chief technology officer for Monsanto. "I look forward to the full reregistration of glyphosate by the EPA without the politicization we recently observed in the EU."

The EU has been a hotbed of anti-glyphosate activity recently. Over the summer, some member states, including France and Germany, opposed renewing glyphosate amid protests from the EU's influential green activists; in June, the European Commission approved glyphosate use for 18 months instead of 15 years, the original timetable. On August 26, Italy announced strict limits on using glyphosate in public spaces such as schools and parks. Other countries are considering restrictions as well.

Activists here are also ratcheting up public opposition. They are trying to whip up fear by claiming glyphosate is being found in everything from bagels to breastmilk, even in vaccines (a tidy way to more strongly link the politically allied people in the anti-vaccine and anti-GMO movements). Companies like Quaker Oats are being sued for labeling their products “natural” because the company uses glyphosate to dry their oats. Last week, anti-science activists such as the Organic Consumers Association held a fake “tribunal” against Monsanto at The Hague, charging the company of ecocide for manufacturing glyphosate, calling it the “source of the greatest health and environmental scandal in modern history.”

These fear-mongers will endure a major blow when the EPA certifies (again) that glyphosate is safe (again), which appears to be the inevitable conclusion no matter how long they want to drag it out. The fear-mongering about glyphosate won’t stop, but at least the activists can continue to be challenged and refuted with solid science.

COPYRIGHT © 1978-2016 BY THE AMERICAN COUNCIL ON SCIENCE AND HEALTH

Source URL: <https://www.acsh.org/news/2016/10/21/why-did-epa-delay-its-glyphosate-safety-report-10339>

Links

[1] <http://www.shutterstock.com>

[2] <https://science.house.gov/legislation/hearings/full-committee-hearing-ensuring-sound-science-epa>

[3] <https://www.epa.gov/sap/carcinogenic-potential-glyphosate-postponed>

[4] <http://src.bna.com/eAi>

[5]

<https://science.house.gov/sites/republicans.science.house.gov/files/documents/06.07.16%20SST%20Letter%20to%20>

[6] <https://www.regulations.gov/document?D=EPA-HQ-OPP-2016-0385-0094>