

Docs Reveal Monsanto's Attempts to Influence Reports About Roundup

Law firm releases trove of "secret documents" detailing employees' messages to writers and scientists

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Featured image: Roundup's active ingredient, glyphosate, is the most heavily-used agricultural chemical in history. (Photo: [Mike Mozart](#)/Flickr/cc)

A [trove of Monsanto's internal records](#) released on Tuesday raises serious concerns about company efforts to influence media reports and scientific research related to risks posed by its popular weedkiller, Roundup.

As the *New York Times* [reported](#):

Documents show that Henry I. Miller, an academic and a vocal proponent of [genetically modified crops](#), asked Monsanto to draft an article for him that largely mirrored one that appeared under his name on Forbes's website in 2015. Mr. Miller could not be reached for comment.

A similar issue appeared in academic research. An academic involved in writing [research](#) funded by Monsanto, John Acquavella, a former Monsanto employee, appeared to [express discomfort](#) with the process, writing in a 2015 email to a Monsanto executive, "I can't be part of deceptive authorship on a presentation or publication." He also said of the way the company was trying to present the authorship: "We call that ghost writing and it is unethical."

A Monsanto official said the comments were the result of "a complete misunderstanding" that had been "worked out," while Mr. Acquavella said in an email on Tuesday that "there was no ghostwriting" and that his comments had been related to an early draft and a question over authorship that was resolved.

The dozens of documents include text messages and emails among Monsanto employees discussing Roundup's safety, as well as their communications with writers and researchers. They were released by one of the law firms representing a group of gardeners, farmers, and agricultural workers who are suing Monsanto over allegations that glyphosate, a key chemical in Roundup, caused them to develop cancer. These documents follow [records](#) released in March that, among other things, revealed company ties to an official at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), prompting an [investigation](#) into possible collusion between Monsanto and the EPA staffer.

“This is a look behind the curtain,” Brent Wisner, an attorney from the firm that released the documents, [told](#) journalist Carey Gillam, who is also the research director for U.S. Right to Know. “These show that Monsanto has deliberately been stopping studies that look bad for them, ghostwriting literature and engaging in a whole host of corporate malfeasance. They (Monsanto) have been telling everybody that these products are safe because regulators have said they are safe, but it turns out that Monsanto has been in bed with U.S. regulators while misleading European regulators.”

“This trove marks a turning point in Monsanto’s corporate life,” Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., another attorney involved with the class action suit, [told](#) Gillam. “They show Monsanto executives colluding with corrupted EPA officials to manipulate and bury scientific data to kill studies when preliminary data threatened Monsanto’s commercial ambitions, bribing scientists and ghostwriting their publications, and purchasing peer review to conceal information about Roundup’s carcinogenicity, its toxicity, its rapid absorption by the human body, and its horrendous risks to public health and the environment....We can now prove that all Monsanto’s claims about glyphosate’s safety were myths concocted by amoral propaganda and lobbying teams.”

Glyphosate, Roundup’s active ingredient, is the [most](#) heavily-used agricultural chemical in history. Although the popular weed-killer has been approved by U.S. regulators for decades, glyphosate is often condemned by environmentalists and food safety advocates, who worry about [hormone disruption](#), and the [contentious debate](#) over whether glyphosate causes cancer—as well as its role in the “[pesticide treadmill](#).” It was [deemed](#) a “probable human carcinogen” by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2015, and in June California [announced](#) it would add glyphosate to the [state’s list](#) of known cancer-causing chemicals.

More than 700 pages of documents also reveal Monsanto’s efforts to discredit the WHO classification, which was issued by the agency’s International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). As *Splinter* [reported](#):

Earlier this year Reuters [published](#) a supposedly damning story which posited that the academic who led IARC’s inquiry into glyphosate mislead the organization about his findings.

Though, as Carey Gillam of the Huffington Post [noted](#), the journalist who authored the story, Kate Kelland, relied on documents that were likely given to her by Monsanto. The documents Kelland cited were unavailable to the public at the time, but Monsanto had copies. Kelland’s story also relied on a paid consultant and scientist for Monsanto, Bob Tarone.

Monsanto’s continuous effort to discredit WHO’s research, as revealed the numerous published documents, only serves to taint its own insistence that Roundup isn’t toxic. If glyphosate was truly harmless, Monsanto would not have bribe, pressure, or persuade academics to say otherwise.

The release of Monsanto’s “[secret documents](#)” was widely supported and circulated by environmentalists and food safety advocates online:

Just Released Docs Show Monsanto 'Executives Colluding With Corrupted EPA Officials to Manipulate Scientific Data' <https://t.co/aCYVEIWPSn>

— Mark Ruffalo (@MarkRuffalo) [August 1, 2017](#)

New [#MonsantoPapers](#) add to questions of regulatory collusion, scientific mischief <https://t.co/LdA7TwsBri> via [@careygillam](#) of [@USRightToKnow](#)

— Gary Ruskin (@garyruskin) [August 1, 2017](#)

New court docs show how [@MonsantoCo](#) controls regulatory agencies, buying off scientists & blocking negative studies. <https://t.co/S8pq5gM5Hz>

— Organic Consumers (@OrganicConsumer) [August 1, 2017](#)

Released docs show [@MonsantoCo](#) execs colluding with EPA officials to manipulate scientific data. <https://t.co/xz6hrrFSjS>

— Friends of the Earth (@foe_us) [August 1, 2017](#)

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