

Monsanto's Roundup Herbicide and Regulators

"With Something to Hide"

"Our Health Sacrificed for Commercial Interest"

By [Colin Todhunter](#)

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In 2011, Earth Open Source said that official approval of glyphosate (the main ingredient in the weedkiller Roundup) had been rash, problematic and deeply flawed [1]. Its comprehensive review of existing data suggested that industry regulators in Europe had known for years that glyphosate causes birth defects in the embryos of laboratory animals. The review raised questions about the role of the powerful agro-industry in rigging data pertaining to product safety and its undue influence on regulatory bodies.

Despite its widespread use, there is currently little monitoring of glyphosate in food, water or the wider environment. Last year, Friends of the Earth (FoE) and GM Freeze commissioned a study based on urine samples from volunteers in 18 countries across Europe [2]. It found that on average 44 percent of samples contained glyphosate. The proportion of positive samples varied between countries, with Malta, Germany, the UK and Poland having the most positive tests, and lower levels detected in Macedonia and Switzerland. All the volunteers who provided samples lived in cities, and none had handled or used glyphosate products in the run-up to the tests. The study was the first time monitoring has been carried out across Europe for the presence of the weed killer in human bodies.

According to a peer-reviewed report, published last year in the scientific journal Entropy [3], residues of glyphosate have also been found in food. These residues enhance the damaging effects of other food-borne chemical residues and toxins in the environment to disrupt normal body functions and induce disease, according to the report's authors, Stephanie Seneff, a research scientist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and science consultant Anthony Samsel. The study says that negative impact on the body is insidious and manifests slowly over time as inflammation damages cellular systems throughout the body.

In Mississippi, 75 percent of air and rain sample contained levels of glyphosate that could have serious physiological consequences for humans [4]. Even if you are careful about what you eat, there is no escaping this poison. Sayer Ji from GreenMedInfo:

"The reality is that the environment is becoming so saturated with the 'fall out' from the ever-expanding GM agricultural/agrichemical farming grid that even if you somehow find a way to avoid eating contaminated food, you will be forced to have to deal with its adverse health effects, as long as you need air to breath and water to drink." [5]

In 2010, the provincial government of Chaco province in Argentina issued a report on health statistics from the town La Leonesa. The report showed that from 2000 to 2009, following the expansion of genetically-modified soy and rice crops in the region (and the use of glyphosate), the childhood cancer rate tripled in La Leonesa and the rate of birth defects increased nearly fourfold over the entire province [6].

As in Chaco, the introduction of Roundup Ready crops in the US has resulted in an increase of glyphosate use. Using official US government data, Dr Charles Benbrook, research professor at the Center for Sustaining Agriculture and Natural Resources at Washington State University, states that since 1996 the glyphosate rate of application per crop year has tripled on cotton farms, doubled in the case of soybeans and risen 39 percent on corn. The average annual increase in the pounds of glyphosate applied to cotton, soybeans, and corn has been 18.2 percent, 9.8 percent, and 4.3 percent, respectively, since herbicide tolerant crops were introduced [7].

Glyphosate was approved for EU-wide use in 2002. Yet there is a mounting body of evidence that links glyphosate with a range of serious health problems and diseases, including Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, birth defects, autism, infertility and cancers [8]. If regulatory bodies had done their job properly, we would not now be in this situation.

FoE argues that the European regulatory agencies did not carry out their own safety testing, relying instead on data provided by the manufacturers. Of course, it has for some time been noted that regulatory agencies in Europe, the US and Canada have shown a dereliction of duty by prioritising the needs of big food and agro-industry concerns and their products over any notion of public safety or the public interest. We know that outright corruption and serious conflicts of interest have been major factors in this respect [9,10,11,12].

Something to hide

Regulators have much to answer for. But they are silent. Claire Robinson from GM Watch notes that earlier this year a group of Chinese food safety volunteers submitted a request to China's Ministry of Agriculture to disclose the study that justified issuing the safety certificate for the import into China of Monsanto's Roundup. Writing on the GM Watch website, she says:

"The Ministry replied that Roundup was registered in China in 1988 based on a toxicology test report issued by a testing company called Younger Laboratories in St Louis, Missouri. The test was an acute exposure toxicity test (such tests last a maximum of a few days), with Roundup being given to rats by mouth and applied to the skin of rabbits. It claimed to find no effect on the eyes or skin, and no allergy. The volunteers asked the Ministry to release the study, and the Ministry in turn asked Monsanto. Monsanto replied that the study constituted its own commercial secret, adding that the company had never disclosed the study anywhere in the world and did not agree to disclose it now. The volunteers are appealing against the decision." [13]

In Europe, Tony Tweedale, a Brussels-based advisor to NGOs on toxicity and risk assessment issues, asked the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) to disclose the two key chronic toxicity studies on glyphosate that the German regulatory agencies relied upon to set the Acceptable Daily Intake of the chemical.

Robinson notes that both the German government regulatory agencies (their decisions form the basis for the widespread use of glyphosate) and EFSA have refused Tweedale's requests to release the studies, on the grounds that they are commercially confidential information. Pesticide Action Network Europe previously asked the German regulatory agencies to release the full range of long-term toxicity studies on glyphosate. They refused, again for reasons of commercial confidentiality.

According to Robinson, such official stonewalling raises the question of what could be in these industry studies that that public is not allowed to see. The assumption is that the industry – and regulators – have something to hide.

The Earth Open Source review mentioned at the start of this article found that the biotech industry's own studies conducted in the 1980s and 1990s showed that glyphosate causes birth defects in experimental animals. While the industry studies themselves are held by the German government and remain secret, the Earth Open Source authors examined Germany's summary report on the studies, which is in the public domain. This report was submitted to the EU Commission and led to glyphosate's European approval in 2002.

The Earth Open Source authors found that the German regulator consistently dismissed evidence of birth defects using unscientific reasoning.

Claire Robinson says:

“... if the German government or EFSA were to release the industry studies, independent academic scientists could reanalyze the data (and methodology) and form their own conclusions about the safety of glyphosate. Given the past failures of risk assessment, these could well be at odds with the conclusions of the German regulator.”

In his recent book, 'Poison Spring' (Bloomsbury), former US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) worker Evaggelos Vallianatos quotes the EPA scientist Adrian Gross as saying that his colleagues, EPA toxicologists, “go straight to the company's summary and lift it word for word and give it as their own evaluation of those studies.”

In a similar vein to the claims by Valliantos, former Monsanto boss in India during the eighties has said that the company faked data and so-called regulators just accepted such data at face value [14].

And here lies the crux of the matter: proper, independent analyses of risks being sidelined and 'regulation' amounting to little more than blindly accepting dubious industry claims or studies that merely say its products are safe. And yet, this is an industry that tried to rubbish the now republished the Seralini team's study into GMOs and glyphosate. While the Seralini team's two-year study has now undergone three rounds of peer-review, the industry keeps its own inadequate three-day or three-month studies secret by hiding behind the all too convenient notion of 'commercial confidentiality' and restricts, controls and censors independent research concerning its products [15]; if that fails, it sets out to smear, intimidate, bully and discredit researchers whose findings are not to their liking [16,17].

If the Serlani-led study and the rest of the evidence alluded to in this article show one thing, it is that regulators ought to do what they are supposed to and go back and properly reassess the products which they have allowed agribusiness to contaminate and poison us

with. However, based on initial reactions to the Seralini-led study, the EFSA may have already made up its mind. William Engdahl states:

“A spokesman for the EFSA announced just a few weeks after the publication of Seralini’s bombshell study and without proof, “EFSA’s analysis has shown that deficiencies in the Seralini et al. paper mean it is of insufficient scientific quality for risk assessment. We believe the completion of this evaluation process has brought clarity to the issue.... Serious defects in the design and methodology of a paper by Seralini et al mean it does not meet acceptable scientific standards and there is no need to re-examine previous safety evaluations of genetically modified maize NK603.” No mention of what the “serious defects” nor of why that would not call for repeating the two-year tests with other independent scientific groups around the EU to determine whether or not Seralini’s results were accurate... “Case closed, ladies and gentlemen and don’t ask us for more on this...” The mainstream media in Germany and across the EU dutifully swallowed that nonsense as the end of the discussion. Monsanto maize and Monsanto Roundup herbicide were “safe.”” [18]

If someone was standing in front of you threatening your health or the lives or health of your children, wouldn’t you take action? There’s little difference between that situation and what powerful corporations, with their politicians and bureaucrats in tow [19,20], are doing to our food. Our health is being sacrificed for the commercial interests of a few powerful corporations.

At the very least, the public would like regulators to regulate, not product promote.

Notes

[1]

<http://earthopensource.org/index.php/reports/17-roundup-and-birth-defects-is-the-public-being-kept-in-the-dark>

[2] <http://www.foeeurope.org/weed-killer-glyphosate-found-human-urine-across-Europe-130613>

[3] <http://www.mdpi.com/1099-4300/15/4/1416>

[4] <http://ecowatch.com/2014/02/27/monsantos-roundup-found-in-75-of-air-and-rain-samples/>

[5]

<http://www.greenmedinfo.com/blog/roundup-weedkiller-found-75-air-and-rain-samples-gov-study-finds?page=2>

[6] <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-147561-2010-06-14.html>

[7] <http://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-147561-2010-06-14.html>

[8]

<http://www.gmo-evidence.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Glyphosate-Destructor-of-Human-Health-and-Biodiversity.pdf>

[9] <http://www.globalresearch.ca/stench-of-eu-corruption-in-monsanto-gmo-whitewash/5316294>

[10] <http://rense.com/general33/fd.htm>

[11]

<http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2011/05/14/dr-shiv-chopra-on-corrupt-to-the-core.aspx>

[12]

<http://corporateeurope.org/pressreleases/2014/04/european-parliament-demands-stricter-regulation-conflicts-interest-eus-food>

[13]

<http://gmwatch.org/index.php/news/archive/2014/15519-the-glyphosate-toxicity-studies-you-re-not-allowed-to-see>

[14]<http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/Monsanto+'faked'+data+for+approvals+claims+its+ex-chief/1/83093.html>

[15]

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/gmo-scandal-the-long-term-effects-of-genetically-modified-food-on-humans/14570>

[16]

<http://www.gmwatch.org/latest-listing/1-news-items/12715-seralini-vs-fellous-a-gmo-libel-case-over-independent-expertise-and-science>

[17]

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/gmo-researchers-attacked-evidence-denied-and-a-population-at-risk/5305324>

[18] <http://www.gmfreecymru.org/documents/engdahl.html>

[19]

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/monsanto-syngenta-and-bayer-cropscience-the-gmo-biotech-sector-cant-win-the-scientific-debate-the-options-are-co-option-deception-and-collusion/5381725>

[20]

<http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/Filmmaker-Mahesh-Bhatt-calls-Veerappa-Moily-a-corporate-mole/articleshow/31215130.cms>

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About the author:

Colin Todhunter is an extensively published independent writer and former social policy researcher. Originally from the UK, he has spent many years in India. His website is www.colintodhunter.com
https://twitter.com/colin_todhunter

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