

Slap in the Face for Monsanto: European Parliament Votes to Ban Most Uses of Glyphosate

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The EU Parliament has responded to the health concerns of millions by calling on the Commission to severely restrict permitted uses of the toxic herbicide glyphosate, including an effective ban on pre-harvest dessication of crops.

This resolution opposes approval of glyphosate for most uses, and takes aim at the excessive length of the approval proposed by the Commission, which must now address these concerns.

The European Parliament today adopted a resolution strongly opposing the Commission's proposal to reapprove the controversial weedkiller glyphosate for use in Europe for 15 years.

The resolution flags significant concerns with the Commission's proposal, notably calling for significantly restricting the uses for which glyphosate – best known in Monsanto's 'Roundup' formulation – could be approved.

The Parliament's vote precedes a decision by EU government representatives on whether or not to support the Commission proposal to approve glyphosate for use in the EU. This may take place at the next EU pesticides committee meeting on 18-19 May.

While the 374 to 225 vote is non-binding on the Commission and EU governments, it will nonetheless carry strong moral weight since it comes from the EU's only elected body directly representing EU citizens and will force a discussion of the issues raised.

The resolution calls for no approval of glyphosate – recently determined to be “probably carcinogenic” by the WHO's cancer watchdog, the IARC – for many uses now considered acceptable, including:

- non-professional uses;
- in or close to public parks, playgrounds and gardens;
- where integrated pest management systems are sufficient for necessary weed control.

It also calls for the renewal to be limited to just seven years instead of the 15 proposed by the Commission.

Pre-harvest 'dessication' strictly limited

The resolution additionally demands strict limits on 'pre-harvest' applications on crops, with a strong recital calling such uses "unacceptable". This refers to the practice of spraying crops up to two weeks before harvest to 'dessicate' the plants and make harvesting easier.

Pre-harvest application of glyphosate is a clear route for human exposure to glyphosate via the harvested crop. Currently glyphosate formulations are licenced for a wide range of crops including wheat, barley, oats, oilseed rape (canola), linseed, field beans and peas.

This use of glyphosate is believed to be the main source of the herbicide and its residues [in bread](#) and NGOs including the UK's [Soil Association are campaigning to stop this use](#).

The resolution further calls for:

- An independent review of overall toxicity of glyphosate;
- A call on the Commission and EFSA to immediately disclose all scientific evidence for the positive classification of glyphosate, given the overriding public interest in disclosure;
- A call on the Commission to test and monitor glyphosate residues in foods and drinks produced in the Union as well as in imported produce;
- Strong criticism of the Commission for accepting an incomplete dossier with regard to endocrine disruption;
- strong criticism of the problem of resistances of weed created by glyphosate, and the toxic spiral by agro-biotech companies adding further resistances to plants.

'The Commission and EU governments must take note'

After the vote, Green food safety and public health spokesperson Bart Staes said:

"The European Parliament has today highlighted serious concerns with the proposal to re-approve glyphosate for use in Europe and the Commission and EU governments must take note.

"We would have preferred if MEPs had followed the recommendation of the Parliament's environment committee in clearly calling for an outright rejection of the re-approval of glyphosate. However, this resolution opposes approval of glyphosate for most of its uses, and takes aim at the excessive length of the approval proposed by the Commission.

"This is a shot across the bow of the Commission and it must now work with EU governments to address these concerns, rather than pushing ahead with its proposed reapproval."

Although falling short of the full ban demanded by the Greens and campaigners, the passage of the resolution represents a huge victory for all those who have opposed the Commission's proposal to re-licence for all existing uses for 15 years and heavily lobbied their MEPs. Over 1.4 million people have signed an [Avaaz petition](#) opposing the relicencing of glyphosate.

The passing of the resolution also represents some skilful political footwork by the Greens in the EU Parliament. While they wanted a [complete ban on glyphosate](#), they worked with

other political groups to impose restrictions that would secure a majority of votes from other parties – even though the Greens opposed the final resolution as falling short of a complete ban.

“There is growing opposition among EU governments to reapproving glyphosate for use in the EU and we hope today’s vote, combined with major public opposition, will convince more governments to change their minds on glyphosate”, Staes continued.

“Given the serious health and environmental concerns and conflicting scientific advice regarding glyphosate, it is scandalous that the EU Commission proposed to continue to allow its use for 15 more years, without any restrictions on its use.

“With the WHO assessment having concluded the substance is probably carcinogenic, EU governments must heed these concerns and reject the Commission’s proposal.”

Rural residents still left at risk

However pesticides campaigner Georgina Downs points out that even if the Parliament’s position was adopted by EU Governments, millions of rural residents would still be at risk from agricultural use of glyphosate:

“The European Parliament vote has seemingly recognised the risk to the health of transient bystanders and non-professional users of pesticides but left at risk from exposure and adverse impacts the group with one of the highest levels of exposure which is rural residents living in the locality of sprayed crop fields ...

“There are many millions of rural residents across the EU (including babies, children, pregnant women, the elderly, people already ill and/or disabled) who have no protection at all from exposure to this (or indeed any other) pesticide that is often sprayed in the locality of their homes and gardens.”

In a statement, Avaaz gave the vote a cautious welcome, pointing out that “with mounting public concern the vote in the European Parliament could be a major influencing factor for the decision of the Commission on a new license.”

Pascal Vollenweider, Avaaz Campaign Director, added:

“This vote shows European politicians are beginning to listen to the citizens they represent and independent science, but we will still be glyphosate lab rats for 7 more years. Two-thirds of Europeans [want to suspend glyphosate](#) until it is proven safe and it’s now up to the Commission to put public health before corporate profits.”

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