

Circulation: NFUonline

Date: 5th September, 2017

Ref:

Contact: emma.hamer@nfu.org.uk

Tel: 024 7685 8522

Glyphosate re-authorisation update

Glyphosate is used in a number of ways in agriculture in the UK and globally. It is the active ingredient in the world's most widely used weed killer, Roundup. In the UK it is used in stubble fields for weed control before planting and before new crops start to appear. It is also used on cereals and oilseed rape before harvest to help make harvesting easier, control weeds, reduce disease and the potential for natural contaminants to develop, and to curb the number of weeds in the following season. The NFU has been campaigning for a full 15 year re-approval. NFU members have been fully involved with this campaign; writing to politicians both in the UK and in Europe, attending MP surgeries, hosting farm visits and tweeting and this has helped enormously to highlight the importance of glyphosate to politicians.

Timelines

On March 15th 2017, The European Chemicals Agency (ECHA)'s Committee for Risk Assessment announced it had finished its review of the available scientific evidence and reached the conclusion that [glyphosate is not a carcinogen and does not cause genetic or reproductive effects](#). A decision on the reauthorisation of glyphosate is due to be made by the European Commission before the end of 2017.

European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) Assessment

The NFU has welcomed the conclusions of the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) in March this year which say the scientific evidence 'did not meet the criteria to classify glyphosate as a carcinogen, as a mutagen or as toxic for reproduction' ([read the ECHA press release here](#)).

The overwhelming weight of evidence shows that glyphosate poses no risk to human health when used correctly. This opinion is shared by regulatory bodies around the world, including the World Health Organisation, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN and the European Food Safety Authority.

Now that ECHA has released its classification there can be no reason why glyphosate should not be re-authorised for a further 15 years when the European Commission makes its decision later this year. We will continue to work with our members and with other European farming unions to ensure the facts about glyphosate's safety and importance are heard in the run-up to that decision.

Glyphosate and Safety

Independent regulatory bodies around the world have looked at the available scientific evidence and concluded the glyphosate poses little or no risk to people when used correctly.

On March 15 2017, the Committee for Risk Assessment (RAC) of the [European Chemicals Agency \(ECHA\)](#) completed an extensive review of all the available scientific evidence on glyphosate and concluded it should not be classified as a carcinogen or as a substance that causes genetic or reproductive effects. ECHA is a regulatory authority on the safety of chemicals and a key adviser to the European Commission on the risks of substances to human health.

Tim Bowmer, the committee's chair, said: "RAC agreed with the German dossier submitter that glyphosate should not be classified as a carcinogen – that is, as a substance causing cancer. This conclusion was based both on the human evidence and the weight of the evidence of all the animal

The voice of British farming



studies reviewed. In addition, RAC concluded that glyphosate does not warrant classification as a mutagen – that is, a substance causing genetic effects – or as a substance causing reproductive effects.”

He concluded: “The committee’s opinion was adopted by consensus – that is, with the full support of all the members and there were no minority positions.”

ECHA’s conclusion reflected the conclusions of regulatory bodies around the world who had concluded glyphosate posed no human health risk when used correctly. The [European Food Safety Authority \(EFSA\)](#) carried out a review which concluded that glyphosate is unlikely to be carcinogenic and poses minimal risk to non-target plants and animals when used appropriately. This conclusion is consistent with the outcome of other regulatory evaluations of glyphosate around the world, in countries including the [United States](#), [Canada](#), [Australia](#), [New Zealand](#), and [Germany](#) – all of which supported the conclusion that glyphosate posed no unacceptable risk when used correctly. This view was also upheld in a joint report from the [World Health Organisation and the Food and Agriculture Organisation](#) of the UN.

Glyphosate is authorised for use in more than 150 countries around the world.

The only organisation with a differing view on glyphosate is the [International Agency for Research on Cancer \(IARC\)](#) which concluded it is “probably carcinogenic to humans”. IARC looks at whether it is possible something can cause cancer under any circumstances – a hazard-based approach. Other regulatory agencies like the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) look at whether the levels of products encountered by people like farmers or consumers in everyday life can actually cause cancer; a risk-based approach. According to IARC’s classifications, drinking very hot drinks, working as a hairdresser, and working night-shifts are as likely to cause cancer as glyphosate; sunlight and drinking alcohol are more likely to.

IARC has looked at 998 substances and found that 492 are probably carcinogenic to humans to some degree; 505 it deems aren’t classifiable as to carcinogenicity to humans; and 1 that is probably not carcinogenic to humans – that 1 is caprolactam which is a chemical primarily used in the manufacture of synthetic fibres.

AGENTS CLASSIFIED BY THE IARC MONOGRAPHS, VOLUMES 1–117

Group 1	<i>Carcinogenic to humans</i>	119 agents
Group 2A	<i>Probably carcinogenic to humans</i>	81
Group 2B	<i>Possibly carcinogenic to humans</i>	292
Group 3	<i>Not classifiable as to its carcinogenicity to humans</i>	505
Group 4	<i>Probably not carcinogenic to humans</i>	1

Pre-harvest use and maximum residue levels (MRLs)

The Maximum Residue Limit (MRL), is the maximum amount of pesticide residue that is expected to remain on food products when a pesticide is used according to label directions, that will not be a concern to human health. Some campaign groups have expressed concern about the use of glyphosate as a pre-harvest treatment. Pre-harvest use of glyphosate in cereal and oilseed rape crops helps to control weeds, dries out the crop and promotes ripening. This is seen as good agricultural practice as it reduces crop losses, enhances the quality of the grain and timely harvest reduces the incidence of mycotoxins. Farmers must observe legally prescribed intervals between applying the product and harvesting the crop, to ensure residues are minimised. The Government’s most recent pesticide monitoring programme, see [PRiF Report](#) found that in 2015, none of the bread products it tested contained glyphosate residues above the maximum levels permitted and therefore would pose no risk to public health. Even if residues were at the highest levels detected by the monitoring programme, an individual would need to eat over 4500 loaves of bread each day before there was even a small risk of a negative health impact as a result of glyphosate residues.

Useful Links

[get involved in the glyphosate campaign](#)

[glyphosate is vital leaflet](#)

[glyphosate infographic](#)

[the ECHA decision on carcinogenicity](#)

[the independent evidence](#)

[managing glyphosate resistance](#)