

7 September 2017

The EU glyphosate timeline

On 8 February 2017, Greenpeace and other groups, including Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO), the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL), Pesticide Action Network Europe (PAN-E), and WeMove launched a European Citizens' Initiative (ECI) to ban glyphosate, reform the EU pesticide approval process, and set mandatory targets to reduce pesticide use in the EU. The goal is to collect at least one million signatures from Europeans and submit the petition before the Commission's next move to renew, withdraw or extend the EU licence of glyphosate. To sign the #StopGlyphosate ECI, people can visit stopglyphosate.org and follow a simple two-step procedure.

In March 2015, months before the EU glyphosate licence was due to run out, cancer experts at the World Health Organisation (WHO) classified glyphosate as "[probably carcinogenic to humans](#)". This sparked a wide public and political debate on whether the most widely used weedkiller should stay on the shelves.

European Union regulations prohibit the use of herbicides when there is "[sufficient evidence in animals](#)" that links it to cancer, based on WHO criteria. According to WHO experts, glyphosate fulfils these criteria. However, in November 2015, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) claimed – partly based on a review of unpublished industry-funded studies – that there was insufficient evidence to conclude that glyphosate can cause cancer.

Based on the EFSA conclusion, the European Commission proposed renewing glyphosate's licence for 15 years. However, following a public outcry, the proposal did not receive sufficient backing by national governments and the Commission eventually extended the current approval to 18 months. It will have to revisit this decision and determine the long-term fate of the glyphosate licence before it runs out on 15 December 2017.

Questions about transparency and democracy

The glyphosate saga has triggered discussion about a number of broader questions:

- Is it acceptable for the EU to rely on unpublished, industry-funded studies to assess the safety of chemical pesticides?
- Should the European Commission approve pesticides when the decision is not backed by a qualified majority of EU countries? [1]
- Why are decisions on pesticides taken in secret, with no official record of the proposals or votes cast?
- Can the EU's food safety agency be trusted to deliver robust and impartial advice?
- In the end, whose interests are being served?

And, above all, will the EU serve its citizens and the environment by reconsidering the massive use of pesticides, and by taking decisions transparently and democratically?

20 March 2015	The WHO's cancer research agency, IARC, classifies glyphosate as " probably carcinogenic to humans ".
12 November 2015	The European Food Safety Authority, EFSA, claims there is insufficient scientific evidence of a cancer link and suggests increasing the acceptable daily intake of glyphosate. It states that " unpublished studies " unavailable to the IARC experts formed the "core basis" of its evaluation. All national safety agencies, except Sweden's Chemical Agency, support the EFSA conclusion.
27 November 2015	Ninety-six independent scientists, including several of those involved in the WHO's cancer review, slam the EFSA assessment as " not supported by the evidence ".
12 December 2015	The French Agency for Food, Environmental and Occupational Health and Safety, ANSES, says glyphosate may need to be classified as a 'suspected human carcinogen' and the European Chemical Agency should "rapidly" review its classification.
7 March 2016	The Commission fails to muster a qualified majority of EU countries [1] to grant a new 15-year licence to glyphosate. It cancels a planned vote.
4 April 2016	Health Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis asks glyphosate producers for the full publication of confidential industry studies on glyphosate's potential cancer link. The producers only offer to make the redacted studies available in guarded reading rooms .
13 April 2016	The European Parliament calls for a ban on glyphosate use: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - in private and public green areas, - in agricultural fields shortly before harvesting, - where weeds can be controlled with other methods. It says any new licence should be limited to seven years.
16 May 2016	The WHO's and FAO's Joint Meeting on Pesticide Residues states that glyphosate is " unlikely to pose a carcinogenic risk to humans from exposure through the diet ". The chair and co-chair of the panel are revealed to be working for an institute that receives money from pesticide companies .
19 May 2016	The Commission fails to gather enough support for a revised proposal to grant a new nine-year licence to glyphosate. It again cancels the vote.
6 June 2016	The Commission requests a vote on a revised proposal to extend the existing licence by 18 months, until the European Chemicals Agency, ECHA, has issued its opinion. The Commission once again fails to get enough support from government representatives.
24 June 2016	In a second (appeal committee) vote on the same proposal, the Commission again fails to gather sufficient support from EU governments.
29 June 2016	In accordance with EU rules, the Commission unilaterally extends the glyphosate licence until the end of 2017.
11 July 2016	EU governments support a separate Commission proposal to ban all weedkillers containing both glyphosate and polyethoxylated (POE) tallowamine, a co-formulant used in many glyphosate-based herbicides.
1 August 2016	The Commission mandates EU governments to ban products with POE tallowamine.
24 August 2016	Glyphosate producers set up a guarded reading room in Brussels with redacted copies of industry studies. Visitors have to register and are not allowed to take notes or pictures.
23 November 2016	In a freedom of information case, the European Court of Justice rules that safety tests conducted by the chemical industry and used by regulators to assess the dangers of pesticides must be disclosed .
9 December 2016	EFSA releases the confidential industry studies to a small group of individuals, under strict conditions and with large parts redacted.

8 February 2017	Civil society groups across Europe launch the European Citizens' Initiative to ban glyphosate and protect people and the environment from toxic pesticides.
14 February 2017	The Commission issues a legislative proposal to change the decision-making rules used for pesticide approvals, among other things. If adopted, the new rules would allow the Commission to claim that it has the backing of a qualified majority when in reality only a small number of countries voted in favour.
15 March 2017	ECHA announces that glyphosate should not be classified in the EU as a carcinogen.
16 May 2017	The Commission says it wants to propose another 10-year licence for glyphosate.
1 June 2017	Green MEPs take EFSA to court over full access to industry studies.
13 June 2017	More than 50 MEPs participate in a plenary debate with Health Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis about glyphosate. The Commissioner dismisses their safety concerns saying he was “not responsible to judge on science” but “responsible for following the law”.
15 June 2017	The European Citizens' Initiative to ban glyphosate and protect people and the environment from toxic pesticides passes the legal threshold of one million signatures .
20 July 2017	The Commission discusses its latest proposal for an unrestricted 10-year licence with EU member state representatives in Brussels.
29 August 2017	French environment minister Nicolas Hulot announces that France will vote against the Commission proposal.
To come:	
September 2017	EFSA is to publish an opinion on potential hormone-disrupting effects of glyphosate.
5-6 October 2017	The Commission is to request a vote on its proposal to renew the glyphosate licence for 10 years, through 2027.
11 October 2017	The European Parliament's environment and agriculture committees is to hold a public hearing on the 'Monsanto Papers'.
November 2017	EFSA is to publish an opinion on the impact of glyphosate residues in feed on animal health, and a review of maximum residue levels in food and feed.
November – December 2017	The Commission is to take a decision based on the vote by EU governments. In July, European Health and Food Safety Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis said : “I wanted to make clear that the Commission has no intention to reapprove this substance without the support of a qualified majority of member states. This is and will remain a shared responsibility”.
15 December 2017	Current EU approval for glyphosate expires.

Note:

[1] A qualified majority requires a favourable vote of at least 16 countries, representing at least 65% of the EU population.

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