

Is Roundup good or bad? Depends on who you ask

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Let’s face it- science is wrong from time to time. At one point it was believed the earth was flat and the center of the universe, that Pluto was a planet, and that coffee stunts your growth. Scientists have changed their minds about all of these “facts.” One controversial topic that researchers can’t seem to agree on these days is whether or not glyphosate, the chief ingredient in Roundup weed spray, causes cancer.

The debate about the safety of using pesticides to control roadside vegetation has been around for years, but recently Roundup, and its agrochemical company creator Monsanto, have been in the hot seat again with a surge of lawsuits. The plaintiffs in these cases claim that contact with Roundup was behind their cancer diagnoses.

Now, since there are conflicting reports about Roundup, it is impossible to say from a factual standpoint whether or not the pesticide did indeed cause the illnesses. However, from a legal standpoint, Roundup is to blame.

That is because several court cases have found Monsanto’s products to be culpable as a source of cancer. Plaintiffs have won large sums of money in court orders. KQED.org reported on a notable one: “In San Francisco Superior Court last year, a jury sided with DeWayne Johnson, a Bay Area groundskeeper with non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma who’d used Roundup extensively in his work. The jury awarded Johnson \$289 million, an amount

later reduced by a judge to about \$78 million. In a federal district court last month, another jury concluded that glyphosate significantly contributed to Edwin Hardeman’s cancer diagnosis, awarding him about \$80 million. In both cases, Monsanto and Bayer’s lawyers announced they would appeal.” Bayer, Monsanto’s parent company, acquired the agrochemical giant last year for \$63 billion. In light of recent events, they may be regretting the acquisition.

In a way, opinions surrounding Roundup and other controversial pesticides form a spectrum. Two extremes- the view that the weed killer is dangerous with even the slightest exposure and that which claims it does no harm at all- flank a middle ground which is far more plausible; that Roundup becomes dangerous when contact with it is frequent or prolonged. Think of it as secondhand smoke from cigarettes- a little is unlikely to do any damage, but if you are constantly exposed your chances of getting lung cancer significantly increase.

A *Forbes* article sheds further light on the issue: “A bit more than a year ago, in November 2017, a large study in the *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* looked at nearly 45,000 glyphosate users (farmers and other agricultural workers who apply glyphosate to crops). These “users” have a much higher exposure to Roundup than ordinary people. That study concluded: ‘No association was apparent between glyphosate and any solid tumors or lymphoid malignancies overall, including NHL [non-

Hodgkin lymphoma].’ “They did find, though, that there was a trend- not quite significant- toward an increased risk for one type of leukemia, AML. This trend appeared in users who had the highest exposure to Roundup... The punchline from the new study: people with the highest exposure to glyphosate had a 41% higher risk of non-Hodgkin lymphoma.”

This new research could definitely be used by the pesticide opposition to argue against its implementation. However, KQED points out that it is hard to corroborate such findings: “In humans, research has yet to find a statistically significant connection between cancer and glyphosate- possibly because there isn’t any or maybe because people are exposed to a lot of carcinogens, and generally it’s hard to tease out the effects of just one. So this is an area where opposing experts in court spend a lot of time debating.” In other words, we may never see irrefutable evidence that Roundup and similar pesticides cause or do not cause cancer, simply because it is impossible to rule out the fact that Roundup users who get cancer didn’t get it from another source. For this reason, the pesticide controversy may never be fully resolved.

Despite the lack of concrete evidence one way or the other, there are those that are steely in their resolve that pesticides are harmful and should be eradicated. In our own region, the organization Non Toxic Rogue Valley has formed, which, according to their Facebook page, “is an initiative formed by Beyond Toxics and Pollinator Project

Rogue Valley. Inspired by the success of Non Toxic Irvine, we are working with community residents concerned about the use of pesticides on city and park properties, where families and pets play and relax. We work to educate city officials... about the health and environmental impacts toxic synthetic pesticides have on people, pets, and pollinators, wildlife, and fish, and demonstrate that there are better and safer solutions to the herbicides, insecticides, rodenticides, and fungicides that have been in use for decades.”

As the anti-pesticide movement gradually gains momentum, keep in mind that if yours is the “non toxic” mindset, there are steps you can take to prevent the use of pesticides near your property. The *Illinois Valley News* reported last autumn that JoCo Public Works offers a waiver of their roadside vegetation management services, which includes the use of Roundup, for property owners who are willing to assume the responsibility of keeping the roadside adjacent to their property clear of weeds and encroaching vegetation. Contact Public Works at 541-474-5460 for more details.

Science is a wonderful field that gives us greater insight into the world we live in, but it is far from foolproof. Just because research has offered up zilch in the way of significant evidence to verify that Roundup is the vile substance many make it out to be does not mean you don’t have the right to combat the use of it or advocate against it. If it does come out somewhere down the line that pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, and the whole lot of -cides are as harmless as Monsanto would have the public believe, that’s all well and good. But if the opposite is true, and our judicial system is onto something when it rules that Roundup is complicit in cancer diagnoses and other health hazards, the existence of groups like Non Toxic Rogue Valley and the ability to waive the right to roadside Roundup usage will have been regarded as quite beneficial.

CITY ...

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Community resident Misty Rhodes made a request to the city council for consideration of penalty fees being forgiven for the property located at 144 N Redwood Highway. Rhodes provided photographic evidence of progress made in the improvement and upkeep of the listed property, and further advised that she was being stymied in continuing the improvement due to family issues over actual ownership. Counselor Dan Bosch recommended Rhodes keep communication open with city when encountering problems. In a 3-2 vote, the city agreed to forgive penalty fees (minus small admin fee), understanding property will be fully maintained. Finally, Ordinance 582 was read which clarified the requirement for a permit for all fence construction and repair was discussed and tabled until next meeting to allow for further investigation on the definition of “replacement.”

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