European Network of Scientists for Social and Environmental Responsibility

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Public must know about risk to their health

ENSSER demands transparent glyphosate assessment – away with double standard favouring producers

http://www.ensser.org/media/0315/

A new British scientific study confirms that the glyphosate herbicide Roundup, an essential integral component of the majority of GM crops, causes liver and kidney damage below levels allowed in EU drinking water. At the same time, the European Commission has denied independent experts access to an important glyphosate risk assessment report, while Monsanto and other producers of glyphosate do appear to have had access to it. The European Network of Scientists for Social and Environmental Responsibility (ENSSER) calls this an anti-scientific double standard, and demands consistency and immediate full transparency in glyphosate risk assessment, since important public health issues are involved.

Scientists from King's College London have checked[1] the findings about Roundup toxicity of the much criticised French rat study from 2012. The latter study by Séralini et al.[2] (which suffered violent attacks by opponents, was retracted by Elsevier from the original journal and republished in 2014 in a Springer journal[3]) had reported health damage to rats fed with the glyphosate-based herbicide Roundup and/or Roundup-tolerant genetically modified maize. Signs of increased liver congestions, liver necrosis (areas of dead tissue) and severe inflammatory kidney damage had been found (for all treatments). The French results were based on biochemical, anatomical and histological investigations.

The group of Prof. Michael Antoniou from King's College London, in their new study, analysed the gene expression patterns in the liver and kidneys of the female rats used in the French study. Many of the male rats had died prematurely from liver and kidney damage. The pattern of gene expression (which genes are turned off or on and at what level) is known to underlie the health and disease status of an organ system. With this more quantitative approach, the British group confirmed the damage to both organs caused by the popular Monsanto weedkiller. In this 2-year study, rats were administred the ultra-low dose of 0.1 ppb (50 ng/L glyphosate equivalent). This Roundup dose-level corresponds to half the maximum level of glyphosate allowed in drinking water in Europe. The British authors therefore warn of potential significant health implications of Roundup use for people, animals and wildlife. ENSSER adds that the new findings confirm the inappropriateness of the retraction of the French paper by Elsevier.

[1] http://www.ehjournal.net/content/14/1/70
[2] http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0278691512005637
[3] http://www.enveurope.com/content/26/1/14

At the same time, the European Commission recently decided to refuse independent experts access to the report prepared by the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) on the risk assessment of glyphosate[4]. In a letter, the Commission stated that the documents made available to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) by the German government "are protected in their entirety" as confidential. The EU Commission can see "no overriding public interest" that would justify independent scientists access, even though the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) of the World health Organisation (WHO) has recently declared that glyphosate is probably carcinogenic to humans. Meanwhile, it appears that Monsanto and other producers of glyphosate have already had privileged access and – from their manifest private commercial interest - are debating confidentially the content of the BfR report and the IARC report with the regulatory authorities.

"This constitutes an unacceptable double standard in EU supposedly science-based procedures that ENSSER deplores and demands to end", says Angelika Hilbeck, chair of ENSSER. EU safety limits for glyphosate must be based on publicly verifiable data, since public health is concerned. ENSSER therefore demands full and immediate transparency in glyphosate assessments. Hilbeck: "It cannot be justified to the European public that the producer of a suspected toxic and carcinogenic product widely present in feed and food has privileged access to prior information about its assessment, while the affected public and the independent scientists working in the public interest are refused access to the same information and exchanges. This way the EU gives producers influence on its decision making concerning public health, while denying it to the public and independent science."

ENSSER further draws attention to the mounting evidence suggesting that glyphosate causes birth defects (e.g. Argentine research on frogs and chickens[5] and people's reports of affected children in Argentina[6]). Moreover, the research group lead by Gilles-Eric Séralini has recently published the first independent review of glyphosate herbicides toxic effects below regulatory limits. Around 30 studies showing toxic effects below the regulatory no-observable adverse effect levels have been neglected in the establishment of safety tresholds[7]. This publicly available evidence has, however, so far been ignored by EU regulators in their re-evaluation of glyphosate, quoting unpublished industry studies claiming that glyphosate is safe instead. ENSSER takes the stance that public health policy like this should be based on independent sound scientific data, publicly verifiable and published in peer-reviewed science journals. We hope that the European Commission, in the face of the accumulating evidence of adverse effects and risks of glyphosate-based herbicides, will severely restrict or, best for public health, ban its use.

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[4] https://www.testbiotech.org/en/node/1326
[5] http://www.gmo-free-regions.org/fileadmin/files/gmo-free-regions/GMO-Free_Europe_2010/Carrasco_ChemResToxAug2010.pdf
[6] https://finance.yahoo.com/news/argentines-health-problems-agrochemicals-135627136.html
[7] http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S027869151530034X

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