

Renewing the approval for glyphosate

Glyphosate, one of the world's most widely used active substances in herbicides, has recently become the subject of controversy. The European Commission now proposes to renew its approval for 10 years. The ENVI committee has adopted a motion for a resolution calling for glyphosate to be phased out by 2020, and a vote on this issue is expected during the October II plenary session.

Background

Glyphosate is an active substance used in broad-spectrum herbicides. On the market since 1974, it is one of the world's most commonly used active substances in plant protection products. [Research](#) indicates that in 2014, 826 million kg of glyphosate were used globally, of which 90 % in agriculture. Other uses are mainly for weed control in gardens and non-cultivated areas. The [Glyphosate Task Force](#), an industry consortium, stresses that glyphosate enables higher crop yields and reduced labour requirements in farming. The [Pesticide Action Network](#) coalition of environmental NGOs has meanwhile highlighted environmental and health concerns.

Controversy

In July 2015, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), a branch of the World Health Organization, [classified](#) glyphosate as 'probably carcinogenic to humans'. However, in November 2015, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) [found](#) that it is 'unlikely to pose a carcinogenic hazard to humans' based on a 'large body of evidence', including 'key studies not considered by IARC' that remain unpublished. Following these divergences, the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) [concluded](#) in March 2017 on the basis of the evidence used by EFSA that glyphosate did not class as a carcinogen. However, the release of internal industry documents (known as the 'Monsanto Papers') in the context of lawsuits filed in the USA have triggered allegations that industry sought to influence the scientific evidence, and a European Parliament [public hearing](#) was organised on the topic on 11 October 2017. Meanwhile, a European Citizens' Initiative ('[Stop glyphosate](#)') was submitted to the European Commission on 6 October 2017, having collected over a million signatures.

European Commission proposal

Plant protection products undergo a [dual approval process](#): active substances are approved at EU level by Commission implementing acts after a vote by a standing committee of Member State representatives, and products containing the active substance are subsequently authorised at national level. In June 2016, the Commission extended the approval of glyphosate until 15 December 2017 to leave ECHA time to carry out its assessment. The Commission is now [proposing](#) to renew approval of glyphosate for 10 years, subject to certain [conditions](#). Member State representatives are expected to vote on the proposal on 25 October 2017. Although the Commission has the power to renew the approval in the event that no qualified majority is reached in the standing committee, it indicated in July 2017 that it was unwilling to do so.

European Parliament position

On 19 October 2017, Parliament's ENVI Committee adopted a [motion for a resolution](#) objecting to the draft measure. It calls on the Commission and Member States not to approve household uses, as well as agricultural uses where non-chemical alternatives exist, with all agricultural uses to be phased out by 15 December 2020. It also calls for risk assessments to be based only on published peer-reviewed and independent studies. Parliament is due to vote on the non-binding resolution during the October II plenary session.

Motion for a resolution: 2017/0000(RSP); Committee responsible: ENVI; Members responsible: Pavel Poc (on behalf of the S&D group), Kateřina Konečná (GUE/NGL), Bas Eickhout (Greens/EFA), Piernicola Pedicini (EFDD), and Frédérique Ries.

