



To: House Natural Resources & Energy Committee, House Agriculture Committee
From: Kati Gallagher, Operations & Research Coordinator, VPIRG
Date: February 9, 2017
Re: Joint Hearing on Atrazine

My name is Kati Gallagher, and I am the Operations and Research Coordinator with the Vermont Public Interest Research Group (VPIRG). VPIRG is the state's largest non-profit consumer and environmental advocacy organization in the state, with more than 40,000 members and supporters across Vermont.

One of our core missions is to protect the health and safety of Vermonters and our environment. For over forty years we've fought to remove numerous known toxic and hazardous chemicals from consumer products and from products applied directly onto our fields, yards, and into our waterways. The herbicide atrazine is the second-most widely used weed killer in the United States¹, and the most frequently used chemical on corn in Vermont². Despite being regulated in this state, we know that atrazine still isn't isolated to the land and crops it's applied to: in the past fifteen years, we have seen more than two dozen cases of atrazine found in Vermont's drinking water³. The herbicide was also found to have contaminated over 94% of the water samples tested by the USDA, the most frequent chemical detected⁴.

We all care about our waterways, wildlife, environment and public health. Certain agencies and industries have argued that insufficient proof of harm should not require a ban or even restriction of atrazine, or the countless other industrial chemicals that have significant toxicity concerns. But the science has in fact prompted the European Union to effectively ban atrazine over a decade ago. The science has also resulted in a recent EPA risk assessment concluding that the herbicide cannot be used safely, even at lower concentrations⁵.

In studies conducted on frogs, atrazine has been shown to be an endocrine disrupter at concentrations 30 times lower than the EPA-set limit⁶. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, short-term exposure has been linked with heart, lung, and kidney congestion; low blood pressure; muscle spasms; weight loss; and damaged adrenal glands. Effects of long-term exposure include cardiovascular damage; retinal and some muscular degeneration; and cancer.⁷ The EPA has also found

¹ https://www3.epa.gov/caddis/ssr_herb_int.html

² http://regenerationvermont.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/RVT_VermontsGMOaddiction_9.pdf (page 8)

³ <https://vtdigger.org/2015/06/07/special-report-the-war-on-weeds/>

⁴ <http://www.whatsonmyfood.org/food.jsp?food=WR#f1>

⁵ <https://www.regulations.gov/contentStreamer?documentId=EPA-HQ-OPP-2013-0266-0315&disposition=attachment&contentType=pdf>

⁶ <http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/swcbd/PROGRAMS/science/pesticides/Hayes-et-al-2006.pdf>

⁷ <https://ephtracking.cdc.gov/showAtrazineHealth>

that atrazine poses a “chronic risk” to aquatic plants, fish, amphibians, and invertebrates, as well as “risk concerns” for terrestrial mammals, birds, reptiles and plants⁸.

Unfortunately, some of the herbicides touted as “less harmful” alternatives to atrazine are not any better; Roundup Ready, for example, contains glyphosate, an herbicide classified by the World Health Organization as “probably carcinogenic in humans”⁹ as well as other so-called “inert” ingredients such as POEA (polyethoxylated tallowamine), which has been found to be even more harmful than glyphosate - yet is not considered in government regulations and testing¹⁰. However, there are other options for farmers, such as integrated weed management practices, that are better for the environment, workers, and often, farm productivity¹¹. For instance, ongoing trials from the Rodale Institute and others have found that farming systems without the use of chemical inputs can “produce competitive crop yields, improve soil and water quality, reduce crop damage in drought years, and sequester more carbon in the soil.”¹²

VPIRG, along with many others, believes in the precautionary principle as stated in the Rio Declaration: “When there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.” There is enough proven and potential harm to our environment and public health caused by the widespread application of atrazine to warrant further restrictions on its use at a minimum, and serious consideration of a prohibition on its use in Vermont entirely.

We applaud your interest in the use and regulation of atrazine in Vermont. To the extent that you consider further restrictions on its use, we urge you not to limit the scope of your consideration unnecessarily. Specifically, we urge you to review other chemical herbicides of concern as well, including glyphosate.

Thank you for your time.

⁸ <https://www.regulations.gov/contentStreamer?documentId=EPA-HQ-OPP-2013-0266-0315&disposition=attachment&contentType=pdf>

⁹ <http://www.iarc.fr/en/media-centre/iarcnews/pdf/MonographVolume112.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://theintercept.com/2016/05/17/new-evidence-about-the-dangers-of-monsantos-roundup/>

¹¹ http://www.synapse-energy.com/sites/default/files/SynapseReport.2013-06.NRDC_.Atrazine.12-053.pdf

¹² <http://rodaleinstitute.org/our-work/weed-management-overview/weed-management-current-projects/>