

Testimony submitted to the Committee on Agriculture and Forestry in support of H301 by Leslie Burg, February 17,2020

Conservation Commission Supports Glyphosate (Roundup) Ban

Glyphosate, the herbicide better known as Monsanto's Roundup, has been identified in recent scientific studies as a human carcinogen and toxic to environmental ecosystems. It is widely used in Vermont.

Manchester's Conservation Commission supports a statewide ban on glyphosate and glyphosate-based pesticides as set forth in Vermont House bill H.301 sponsored by Representative Mari Cordes.

Glyphosate has a long and checkered history in the U.S. Patented by Monsanto in 1974 as an herbicide, Roundup was promoted as safe for people, pets, and the environment. Roundup Ready – Monsanto's line of genetically-modified glyphosate tolerant crop seeds – was marketed in the 90's by Monsanto as safe. Since then it has become the most widely used herbicide in the world. Globally, 9.4 million tons have been spread on agricultural lands, enough to spray about half a pound on every cultivated acre of land on the planet. Roundup is also the most popular herbicide used by home gardeners to kill and control weeds in their gardens and elsewhere on their properties.

Monsanto's Roundup Ready seeds are impregnated with glyphosate to make the crops grown from them resistant to the herbicide.

Farmers, who used to be able to save their crop seeds from one season to the next, can no longer do so, and are forced to buy new seed from the company. This makes growing crops more expensive and creates a serious problem in countries where subsistence farming is common. In addition, the use of glyphosate on Roundup Ready crop seeds has given rise to super weeds requiring ever greater and more frequent applications of Roundup to control.

Farmers also use glyphosate herbicides as desiccants on common grain crops to dry them out, making harvesting and storing them easier. The result is that it is almost impossible today to find foods

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that don't contain traces of the chemical. USDA data from 2016 shows 85% of 10,000 foods sampled contain detectable levels of glyphosate. It has been found in everything from grapes to green beans. It's in our oatmeal, Cheerios, and baby food, in beer, wine, and breast milk. It has shown up in the urine of pregnant women.

Despite studies finding that glyphosate caused tumors in mice, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reclassified it as safe in the 1980s and continues to do so today. Indeed, court cases brought against Monsanto reveal decades of lax regulation and oversight by the EPA that allowed glyphosate-based products to be classified as safe despite increasing evidence to the contrary. A growing number of independent studies in the US and Europe, were showing a significant correlation between glyphosate and glyphosate-based formulations and major health and environmental dangers. They also demonstrated that glyphosate with added ingredients was even more toxic than glyphosate alone.

Monsanto claimed that glyphosate formulations were safe because they did not persist in the environment and had no mobility. In fact, both of these assertions are false. Glyphosate persistence in soils ranges from two to over 900 days, and organic soil tends to absorb more of the chemical due to its friability. Glyphosate kills beneficial organisms in the soil effectively rendering it "dead." The result is soil that is dry, compact, subject to erosion, and more difficult to cultivate. Furthermore, water used to irrigate crops sprayed with glyphosate chemicals eventually leaches into groundwater and travels to our streams and rivers, polluting aquatic life and further spreading its toxicity. Additionally, as a neurodisrupter, glyphosate has been reported to cause significant harm to bees and monarch butterflies.

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As a human carcinogen, glyphosate is associated with the development of blood cancers, most commonly non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and leukemia, as well as a type of B cell lung cancer. To date, 18,000 lawsuits have been filed in the U.S. against Monsanto by people claiming their cancer was caused by Roundup, that the company provided no warning that the herbicide might be carcinogenic, and that Monsanto was involved in a cover up of the real dangers associated with its use. In the three cases heard so far, juries have found for the plaintiffs.

Twenty-eight countries worldwide have banned the use of glyphosate. Hundreds of US cities and many counties have issued bans or restrictions on its use because of independent scientific studies attesting to its toxicity. Yet the EPA has recently reclassified glyphosate as safe. It is clear that our federal government is unlikely to act to protect people and the environment from its damaging effects. It is therefore up to us to initiate and support local and state efforts to do so.

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References

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