



## **World Cancer Day 2016**

### **An opportunity to prevent cancer by reducing environmental exposure to glyphosate**

I am writing to you today as President of the Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) to ask for your leadership in a current opportunity to prevent cancer through more protective national and EU policies/laws.

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) is a leading European not-for-profit organisation addressing how the environment affects health in the European Union. With the support of more than 70 member organisations, HEAL brings independent expertise and evidence from the health community to different decision-making processes.

To mark World Cancer Day 2016, we encourage you, as the president of an influential national cancer society, to call on your government for two actions on the chemical glyphosate. Glyphosate was recently classified as a probable carcinogen by the World Health's Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer. (See overleaf for a summary of the scientific research.) Glyphosate is active ingredient in the most widely used herbicides in agriculture as well as public parks, school and hospital grounds, and private gardens, so people all over Europe are likely to be significantly exposed. (See overleaf for more details).

We suggest that you write to your government and call for a national ban on glyphosate use in your country. In addition, we encourage you to call on your government to oppose the renewal of the authorisation for glyphosate in the EU and all EU member countries, which is to be decided before June 2016.

On the following page, we summarise the state of the scientific research on glyphosate and the enormous usage of glyphosate. We would also like to draw your attention to the position of the French Cancer League on glyphosate, which called for a ban in April 2015, and various national control measures taken in response to the IARC finding (see overleaf).

We believe that your leadership on this issue could significantly increase the chances of your national authorities banning this probable carcinogen, and of your government opposing the renewal of glyphosate's authorisation at the EU level. Both of these concrete public health actions could contribute to reducing cancer risk.



Public health and chemicals experts in the HEAL secretariat would be happy to provide you more information, answer any questions, and assist you in drafting the letter.

**For more information please contact the HEAL Secretariat, Ms. Génon K. Jensen, Executive Director ([genon@env-health.org](mailto:genon@env-health.org)).**

We look forward to hearing you response.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Peter van den Hazel

A photograph of a handwritten signature in blue ink on a light-colored background. The signature is cursive and appears to read "P. van den Hazel".

President, Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)

February 4<sup>th</sup>, 2016, Brussels

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### The scientific research

Last year, IARC, the specialist cancer research body which advises the World Health Organization concluded that the herbicide glyphosate should be classified as "*probably carcinogenic to humans*". <http://www.iarc.fr/fr/media-centre/iarcnews/pdf/MonographVolume112.pdf>

Reported in the leading international health journal, *The Lancet*, the Monograph assessing the carcinogenicity of the ingredients used in the herbicide was the work of a panel of 17 experts from 11 countries who met at the International Agency for Research and Cancer (IARC) in Lyon, France.

They concluded that, "there was limited evidence of carcinogenicity in humans for non-Hodgkin lymphoma". The official document also said that: "One study in community residents reported increases in blood markers of chromosomal damage (micronuclei) after glyphosate formulations were sprayed nearby."

### Widespread use

The decision on glyphosate is a particular concern because it is very widely used. Glyphosate- containing herbicides are the most widely used herbicides in Europe and are applied in farming, forestry, parks, public spaces (including playgrounds and hospital grounds), and private gardens. The European Union does not publish data on the use of individual herbicides/pesticides in agriculture, making it difficult to find out how much glyphosate is being used by farmers. However, it is known to be the most commonly used herbicide in commercial fruit orchards in the UK for example. Glyphosate may be present in water; in food products such as milk and eggs, and meat cuts from animals – deriving from residues in their feed; and in grains, pulses (edible seeds, such as lentils), vegetables and fruits as residues from agricultural spraying.



Many Europeans are likely to be significantly exposed to glyphosate. There are very few studies that actually examine glyphosate levels in humans, but a community biomonitoring study in 2013 showed that an average of 45% of urine samples from urban residents in 18 European countries contained glyphosate residues. The rates were highest in Malta, where 90% of urine samples were contaminated followed by Germany, UK and Poland where rates were 70%, Netherlands (63%), Czech Republic (60%), Belgium and Latvia (55%), Cyprus (50%), Spain and Croatia (40%), Hungary and France (30%).

Real life conditions in which the spraying takes places may add to the hazards, particularly during hot weather. The label of the glyphosate-based weed killer recommends that the product is only used in good weather and in temperatures not exceeding 25 degrees Celsius.

### **French control measures**

In April 2015, the French cancer league (la Ligue contre le cancer, 700,000 members) issued a statement calling on the French government to ban glyphosate and four other pesticides included in the IARC classification as soon as possible. In August 2015, la Ligue contre le cancer took a further step by launching a petition to prevent renewal of the licence for glyphosate by the European Union authorities. See [https://www.ligue-cancer.net/article/33849\\_signez-la-petition-non-au-roundup](https://www.ligue-cancer.net/article/33849_signez-la-petition-non-au-roundup)

In June 2015, the French environment minister required French garden centres to stop sales of glyphosate to individuals unless a qualified vendor provides advice.

### **Other national control measures**

The Netherlands banned private sales of herbicides containing glyphosate in 2014. German state consumer protection ministries have called for a ban, and some retailers in Germany have voluntarily taken glyphosate products off their shelves.

The Danish Working Environment Authority (under the Danish Ministry of Employment) has followed the WHO/IARC decision and has now declared glyphosate a carcinogen. This will involve requiring changes in application practices, including recommendations to use alternative, less toxic chemicals. For public parks, school playgrounds and gardens HEAL advocates for the stop of spraying of any pesticides altogether. (see [Roundup Listed Carcinogen by Danish Authority](#), SiS 67)