Pesticide newsletter

N°5 - September 2021

Civil Society Activities

EU: Flaws in regulatory studies on the genotoxicity of glyphosate

Several European media outlets have been able to consult the first independent assessment of fifty-three regulatory studies on the genotoxicity of glyphosate that were used as the basis for the reauthorization of the herbicide in Europe in 2017. These studies, prepared by industry (Monsanto/Bayer, Syngenta, Dow, etc.) had remained confidential until now. But following appeals by MEPs from the Green group, including co-founder and Justice Pesticides board member, Michèle Rivasi, and an individual person, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) ruled on March 7, 2019 that the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) could not refuse to disclose the regulatory studies.

It is on the basis of this jurisprudence that the NGO SumOfUs requested EFSA access to these studies, provided by private laboratories working under contract with agrochemical companies. The analysis of these studies, entrusted by the NGO to two independent Austrian scientists, questions the scientific quality of the studies on the genotoxic properties of glyphosate.

In their report, Siegfried Knasmueller and Armen Nersesyan, researchers at the Institute for Cancer Research of the University Hospital of Vienna (Austria), specialists in genetic toxicology, show that most of the regulatory studies do not comply with modern international standards of scientific rigor and do not include

the most appropriate tests to detect cancer risks. This calls into question the relevance of the results and the reliability of the studies.

Siegfried Knasmueller said that, out of fifty-three studies, only two could be considered acceptable by current internationally accepted scientific standards. Both researchers question the choice of tests and criteria used in these studies, such as tests for chromosomal damage at an early stage in the red blood cells of the bone marrow of laboratory mice and rats, which detect only 50 to 60 percent of carcinogens. Siegfried Knasmueller wonders why EFSA did not require data according to the latest standards in methodology. For example, a type of test known to be much more comprehensive, the "comet assay," has a much higher value for identifying carcinogens, as it can quantify and detect DNA damage in individual cells of various organs, and is commonly used to assess genotoxicity. However, it was not included in any of the studies submitted to EFSA.

Unmoved, Bayer, one of the industry members of the Glyphosate Renewal Group (GRG), an association of companies working for the renewal of glyphosate's approval in the European Union in 2022, claims that the set of studies submitted to EFSA constitutes "one of the most comprehensive scientific dossiers ever compiled for a pesticide active ingredient".

EFSA has refused to comment on the Austrian researchers' analysis and has only announced a public consultation on glyphosate starting in September. This explosive report raises the issue of bias and fraud in industry-funded research to obtain marketing authorization for pesticides.

Back to Justice Pesticides website