

Monsanto Weed Killer Deserves Deeper Scrutiny As Scientific Manipulation Revealed

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The puzzle pieces are starting to fall into place, but so far it's not a pretty picture.

A series of internal Monsanto Co. documents revealed this week via a court order show that the company's long-standing claims about the safety of its top-selling Roundup herbicide do not necessarily rely on sound science as the company asserts, but on efforts to manipulate the science.

Congressman Ted Lieu of California has [called for an investigation](#) by Congress and the Department of Justice to look into the matter, and he is advising consumers to "immediately" stop using Roundup.

"We need to find out if Monsanto or the Environmental Protection Agency misled the public," Lieu said in a statement."

[Hundreds of pages of emails and other records](#) became part of a public court file this week over Monsanto objections after a federal judge in San Francisco ordered they would no longer be kept sealed [despite potential "embarrassment" to Monsanto](#). U.S. District Judge Vince Chhabria is overseeing more than 55 lawsuits brought by individuals filed by people from around the United States who allege that exposure to Monsanto's Roundup herbicide caused them or their loved ones to develop non-Hodgkin lymphoma. In addition to those cases, which are moving forward jointly in what is known as "multidistrict litigation (MDL), hundreds of other cases making similar claims are pending in state courts.

Questions about the key ingredient in Roundup, a chemical called glyphosate, have been circulating for years amid mounting research showing links to cancer or other diseases. The International Agency for Research on Cancer in 2015 classified glyphosate as a [probable human carcinogen](#) and many international scientists have reported research that shows the chemical can have a range of harmful impacts on people.

The plaintiffs in the lawsuit allege that the combination of glyphosate with certain surfactants used in Monsanto-branded Roundup products is even more toxic than glyphosate alone, and Monsanto has sought to cover up that information.

Monsanto has denied that there are cancer connections to glyphosate or Roundup and says 40 years of research and scrutiny by regulatory agencies around the world confirm its safety. On Wednesday a [European Chemicals Agency's committee](#) said its review found glyphosate is not a carcinogen.

But a look at the documents obtained by plaintiffs from Monsanto as part of court-ordered discovery seem to show a company less interested in exploring mounting concerns about its products than in protecting the billions of dollars in revenue it makes each year from the herbicides. The documents show discussions by Monsanto officials about many troubling practices, including ghostwriting a glyphosate manuscript that would appear to be authored by a highly regarded, independent scientist who Monsanto and other chemical industry players would pay for participation. [One such scientist](#) would need “less than 10 days” to do the work needed but would require payment of more than \$21,000, the records show.

[In a 2015 email](#), Monsanto executive William Heydens suggested that Monsanto employees could ghostwrite a research paper as he said had been done in the past: “We would be keeping the cost down by us doing the writing and they would just edit & sign their names so to speak,” Heydens wrote.

The internal communications also show company executives expressing dissatisfaction with a scientist who had concerns about glyphosate, and an unwillingness [to do the studies he suggested](#) needed to be done. Monsanto officials discussed a need to “find/develop someone who is comfortable with the genotox profile of glyphosate/Roundup and who can be influential with regulators... when genotox issues arise.”

Other records show an internal discussion of how glyphosate and surfactants it is formulated with work together in penetrating human skin upon exposure; documents that discuss a need [to “protect” formulations](#) that use tallow amine as a surfactant despite formulations, [despite concerns about enhanced toxicity](#) when glyphosate and tallow amine are combined.

And perhaps most damning - the internal records indicate that a senior EPA official in the agency’s pesticide division worked collaboratively with Monsanto to protect glyphosate’s safety record. Jess Rowland, who headed an EPA Cancer Assessment Review Committee (CARC) report that backed the safety of glyphosate, told Monsanto he would try to block a planned U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ review of glyphosate’s safety, saying: “If I can kill this I should get a medal,” [according to a 2015 internal Monsanto email](#).

Rowland “could be useful as we move forward with ongoing glyphosate defense,” Dan Jenkins, Monsanto’s chief regulatory liaison, [wrote in a 2015 email](#). Rowland left the agency shortly after the CARC report was leaked to the public, posted to an agency website in late April 2016 before it was deleted a few days later. Plaintiffs’ attorneys hope to depose Rowland within the next few weeks, though the EPA has opposed the deposition.

The documents released this week provide only a snapshot of the internal workings of Monsanto when it comes to glyphosate, and the company has argued that the emails and other communications are being taken out of context by plaintiffs’ attorneys and media. The company’s work is built on “sound science,” and [“governed by the highest principles of integrity and transparency.”](#) Monsanto states.

The EPA has also consistently defended the safety of glyphosate, [issuing a report in September](#) that concluded that glyphosate was “not likely carcinogenic to humans.”

But [in a report released Thursday](#), a special advisory panel to the EPA said they could not fully agree with that determination. Some of the panel members who reviewed the research said studies on glyphosate “suggest a potential for glyphosate to affect cancer incidence.” The group said the EPA was improperly discounting the findings of some studies, and “many of the arguments put forth” by the EPA as supporting glyphosate safety “are not persuasive.”

Real answers about the real impacts of Roundup on human health are long overdue, considering the fact that glyphosate is the most widely used herbicide in the world, and is commonly found in food and water and human urine samples.

“The importance of this issue of whether Roundup causes cancer is immense,” the plaintiffs’ attorneys [stated in a recent court filing](#). “Unfortunately, Monsanto is not forthcoming with sharing information on Roundup with the public.”