

EPA says glyphosate not carcinogenic, poses environmental risks (Update)

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The EPA says herbicide glyphosate could pose risks to pollinators such as monarch butterflies, but is not carcinogenic

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) said Tuesday that the weed killer glyphosate is unlikely to cause cancer in humans, but recommended new measures to prevent potential ecological risks, especially to monarch butterflies and other pollinators.

Glyphosate developer Monsanto was convicted in 2018 and 2019 of not taking necessary steps to warn of the potential risks of Roundup—their weed killer containing the chemical, which two California juries found caused cancer in two users.

But in a statement, EPA Administrator Andrew Wheeler said the agency found "no risks to public health from the current registered uses of glyphosate."

It did propose new instructions, subject to a public comment period, for farmers and others using the chemical to reduce "spray drift" that can harm butterflies.

Under those regulations, glyphosate labels in the US would have to instruct aerial users to not spray the chemical from more than 10 feet (three meters) above crops, or if wind speeds exceed 15 miles per hour (24 kilometers per hour).

Meanwhile, labels would also be required to state that when applied from the ground, the chemical must not be sprayed from more than four feet above crops—and that all nozzles must be set to mist the product at a "fine" or coarser setting.

The proposed instructions also include new regulations around glyphosate's use around water.

The EPA said the chemical presents a "low toxicity" to honey bees, but does present a "potential risk" to birds and plants, including aquatic plants.

The agency will publish its final revised regulations at the end of the year.

Agriculture secretary Sonny Perdue praised the proposed regulations, and said glyphosate is an important part of US agriculture.

"USDA applauds EPA's proposed registration decision as it is science-based and consistent with the findings of other regulatory authorities that glyphosate does not pose a carcinogenic hazard to humans," he said in a statement.

The EPA's findings contradict those of the International Agency for Research on Cancer, part of the World Health Organization, which said in 2015 that glyphosate was likely carcinogenic.

German pharmaceutical firm Bayer, which bought Monsanto last year, announced last week that over 13,000 lawsuits related to the weed killer have been launched in the US.

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