

French mayor due in court after banning pesticide use near homes

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A mayor in northwest France is to appear in court on Thursday after banning the use of pesticides near homes in his village in a case that is

seen as emblematic of rising opposition to chemical pollution in rural areas.

The mayor of the village of Langouet, Daniel Cueff, imposed a ban in mid-May on the use of any pesticides on land within 150 metres (yards) of homes or workplaces, citing his authority to block anything polluting the land within his community.

Cueff, who will defend a state challenge to his ban in court, has spent the past 20 years working on environmental issues in his community of around 600, banning chemical weedkiller and opening an organic school canteen in 2004.

Supporters are expected to demonstrate in front of the administrative court in the nearby city of Rennes in the Brittany region on Thursday.

Residents had raised concerns about crop spraying, saying tests had shown several children had "very high levels" of the glyphosate, a controversial weedkiller, in their urine.

But the move angered non-organic local farmers, who insisted the pesticide was necessary to keep weeds at bay and that they had not been consulted.

France has pushed for a EU-wide ban on glyphosate, which is found in the best-selling weedkiller Roundup sold by multinational Monsanto, amid rising concern among consumers about its impact on health.

But the country is one of the European Union's heaviest users of the herbicide, which is sprayed on [food crops](#) but also on public lawns and in forestry.

It has been described by the World Health Organization as "probably

carcinogenic."

The issue of chemical pollution has slowly risen up the political agenda in France as voters grow increasingly concerned about environmental degradation and climate change.

'Better protection'

"We have been working on... how to better protect residents from the spraying of pesticides," Environment Minister Elisabeth Borne told RTL radio on Wednesday, saying there would be a consultation on the matter "very soon".

"The mayor is right about one thing: we have to better protect residents from the spraying of pesticide".

But she also noted it was not acceptable for local officials to take the law into their own hands.

Over the past two years, more than a dozen mayors have issued bans on pesticides. It was not immediately clear how many had been overturned by the courts.

Cueff announced his decision to ban pesticides on May 18 in a public address in his village where he stood on a wooden box dressed in a white protective suit and wearing his tricolour mayor's sash.

"It is legitimate for a [mayor](#) to take action when there is incompetence by the state," he declared.

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