



## **NEED FOR A CONTROLLED, PLANNED AND PROGRESSIVE PHASE OUT OF GLYPHOSATE IN THE INTEREST OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

The EU extended the permission for using glyphosate and glyphosate containing formulations till December 2022 with some restrictions and installed the special PEST committee to review the procedure allowing the use of pesticides in the EU. The conclusions of the committee were approved by the EU-Parliament in January 2019. In December 2019, the procedure for extension of the permission using glyphosate in the EU beyond December 2022 has been initiated by a cluster of companies, Bayer being the most important one.

Taking the mission of the Superior Health Council (SHC) into account and being aware of the importance of the glyphosate file, the SHC expresses his point of view on the matter. It is not the aim to perform another systematic review of the scientific literature but rather to obtain a bird's-eye view on the complexity of the situation and to provide recommendations for Belgian public health authorities. This report was validated by the SHC Board in January 2020. However, the SHC preferred to postpone its publication due to the general - and justified - attention paid to the coronavirus epidemic. In fact, the SHC 's role in public health has meant that the Council too has issued advisory reports in the context of the epidemic. The report on glyphosate was considered too important to be dealt with on the fringes of other important situations requiring special attention (Covid-19). Yet it is time to turn to the future once again and seize the opportunity presented by the necessary economic recovery to ensure that a more sustainable economy is built in which glyphosate (as well as other products) no longer has a place.

### **Toxic effects of glyphosate " the tree that hides the forest " !**

Glyphosate has a complex toxic profile beyond carcinogenicity, and also its endocrine disrupting properties, its effects on the intestinal microbiome of humans and experimental animals and its effects on pollinators (besides the effects of neonicotinoïds) are of concern. The SHC notices that the controversial nature of the literature on carcinogenicity of glyphosate is less pronounced for the other types of toxicity. The conclusion of the SHC is that, although the carcinogenicity of glyphosate is the focus of the current discussions, other aspects of toxicity might be also important and less controversial. These non-carcinogenic effects of glyphosate can be already a sufficient reason for action. The SHC concludes that glyphosate has hazardous properties like many other synthetic compounds.

### **Carcinogenic effects, where does the debate stand?**

The scientific literature shows that glyphosate has genotoxic, oxidative stress inducing and endocrine disrupting properties which point to carcinogenic activity but this activity is difficult to demonstrate in animal studies and the epidemiological evidence for carcinogenicity on

humans is limited. A meta-analysis that includes the most recent update of the largest USA-study including over 50.000 users of glyphosate along with five case-control studies revealed that only a small group of users with the highest exposure to glyphosate shows a limited increased risk for non-Hodgkin lymphoma cancer. For the majority of users, no difference with non-users is found. The SHC concludes that there are reasons to assume that glyphosate is a weak carcinogen and that the risk for humans is limited.

### **In the absence of non-toxic alternatives, the economic stakes are important**

The PEST committee has thoroughly studied the current situation on pesticide use in the EU. The resulting report contains some strong points. However, no conclusions on the toxicity of glyphosate neither on the way to proceed ahead are provided, which is considered a weakness.

In view of the massive worldwide use of this herbicide, the SHC is aware of the important role of glyphosate not only in agriculture but also in economics in general. At the same time, the SHC notices that there is no valid alternative yet for glyphosate. The conclusion of the SHC is that the glyphosate file is complex not only because of its toxicity but also because of the societal aspects.

In view of its internal procedure for the management of conflicts of interest, the SHC offers the best possible Belgian guarantees of transparency and independence of this opinion. In addition, particular attention has been paid to this point through a thorough analysis of the key publications used in the document.

### **And Now?**

1) The SHC recommends that, although the risk of negative effects for humans following exposure to glyphosate is limited, in view of the toxic profile based on carcinogenic and non-carcinogenic effects, the use of glyphosate should stop as soon as possible and preferentially before 15/12/2022, i.e. the end of the running permission period.

2) The SHC recommends that efforts to find an acceptable alternative for glyphosate, either another chemical with comparable properties or other non-chemical methods for weed control should be intensively stimulated. Preferentially – if not necessarily – these efforts should be organized and coordinated at an international level in view of the world wide importance of glyphosate.

3) In accordance with its advice 9404 on the importance of exposures early in life the SHC recommends that the competent authorities – preferentially at a EU level - should establish a coherent plan before the end of the running permission period (December 2022) to abandon the use of glyphosate. This plan must include strict deliverables well defined in time, all aspects should be considered and all stakeholders should participate in this multidisciplinary approach. Although it is not the aim of the SHC to perform risk management, the SHC is willing to participate in this stakeholder process as a scientific institution. The precautionary principle should be applied with caution.

The full advisory report (SHC\_9561) can be found on the website of the Superior Health Council: <https://www.health.belgium.be/en/report-9561-glyphosate-and-glyphosate-containing-formulations>

The website of the Superior Health Council: [www.css-hgr.be](http://www.css-hgr.be)

#### **About the Superior Health Council (SHC)**

The **Superior Health Council** is the Federal Public Service Health, Food Chain Safety and Environment advisory body. In order to guarantee and enhance **public health**, the Council draws up **scientific advisory reports** that aim at providing guidance to political decision-makers and health professionals. Thanks to its network of experts and in-house staff, the Council produces **impartial** and **independent** advisory reports that are based on a multidisciplinary assessment of the state of the art of science. Thus, the SHC applies a system for managing **potential conflicts of interest**. The Council formulates these advisory reports on request or on its own initiative and publishes them.

All public advisory reports and brochures are available on the website:  
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