

Agenda item 5

For discussion and decision - The use of glyphosate herbicides & pesticides

Author: Chris Stringer, Environment Manager

Summary

There are mounting concerns about glyphosate, a herbicide used to kill weeds. It has been linked to a variety of health problems. Studies have also reported negative environmental impacts. The scientific evidence available at present is at best contradictory.

Glastonbury Town Council, is not alone in voting to ban the use of glyphosate across the town's public spaces and in the light of the mounting concerns, it is felt that FTC should not use glyphosate on its own land or any other land (including streets), pending the outcome of further research, EU decisions and UK legislation & guidance.

Background

Glyphosate is a mass-produced, global herbicide; and has been used to manage & control weeds and grass in towns and cities since it was re-patented as such in 1969.

It is the main active ingredient in Roundup, the world's best-selling weed-killer – and is widely-used by local authorities, the agricultural industry and the domestic market.

Amidst significant controversy and health concerns, glyphosate has just been granted an 18-month extension to its European licence.

Nevertheless, the discussion about the health risks posed by glyphosate is set to continue.

Health Concerns

There are mounting concerns about glyphosate – and it has been linked to a variety of health problems.

In March 2015, the World Health Organisation's International Agency for Research on Cancer *IARC* classified glyphosate as 'probably carcinogenic to humans'

However, another World Health Organisation *WHO* study concluded that it was 'unlikely to pose a carcinogenic risk' – an indication of the contradictory findings on the carcinogenic risks of the chemical.

More widely, glyphosate has also been described as an 'endocrine disruptor' and it's been linked with birth defects; kidney failure; celiac disease; colitis and autism.

Environmental Concerns

Other studies have reported environmental impacts – a study in Argentina has suggested a correlation between glyphosate use and the decline in activity in honeybee colonies, for instance. And in New York, an environmental group is suing the national Environmental Protection Agency *EPA* for allegedly ignoring the dangers of glyphosate which, it claims, have resulted in the demise of the monarch butterfly population.

What are others doing?

Because of these concerns, there are now high profile, international campaigns asking for bans on glyphosate. And the Pesticide Action Network UK (PAN-UK) has launched a national anti-glyphosate campaign in the United Kingdom, encouraging pesticide-free towns and cities.

In Europe, Holland, Denmark & Sweden have banned or restricted the use of glyphosate herbicides by local authorities – and a total of 7 EU states already have extensive bans in place.

And the evidence has been enough to convince some cities, including Chicago and Paris, to make their public spaces glyphosate-free. Vancouver has gone a step further, altogether banning the public and private use of herbicides including glyphosate, aside from the treatment of invasive weeds like Japanese knotweed.

Last summer, Glastonbury Town Council voted to ban the use of glyphosate across the town's public spaces. Even more recently, Hammersmith & Fulham Council banned the use of glyphosate in the public spaces throughout its borough – a precautionary step to 'protect residents' health' and become 'the greenest local authority in the country'.

In doing so, H&F commented: 'While there is some debate over the health risks of glyphosate-based chemicals, there is no debate that... the health and well-being of our residents is our priority and we recognise the importance of a green agenda in better supporting that'.

As stated, the scientific evidence available at present is contradictory – findings have divided scientists, governments and international agencies; and Public Health England's current advice is that glyphosate, if used in accordance with standard practice, is not a risk to public health.

What should FTC do?

Even so, in the light of the mounting concerns, it is felt that FTC should not use glyphosate on its own land or any other land (including streets) , pending the outcome of further research, EU decisions – and – going forward – UK legislation & guidance.

Currently, The Landscape Group, as part of their contract with MDC, use glyphosate in managing the town's other public spaces. The County Council also use glyphosate on their estate.

Alternatives

Alternatives to glyphosate include more hand-weeding; burning; the use of hot foam; salt solutions; and even electrocution.

The Town Council's Rangers currently hand-weed on FTC land and if weeding elsewhere—and although it is more time consuming, the team will continue to do this as an effective way of managing weeds.

Recommendations

1. Until further notice, an immediate ban on the use of glyphosate by Frome Town Council
2. For FTC to discuss a town-wide ban of glyphosate in all of the town's public spaces with Mendip District Council & Somerset County Council