

IARC's cancer classification could axe use of glyphosate in Colombian war on drugs

The new labeling of the world's most-popular weed killer as a likely cause of cancer is raising more questions for an aerial spraying program in Colombia that is the cornerstone of the U.S.-backed war on drugs.

The International Agency for Research on Cancer, a French-based research arm of the World Health Organization, has reclassified the herbicide glyphosate as a result of what it said is convincing evidence the chemical produces cancer in lab animals and more limited findings it causes non-Hodgkin's lymphoma in humans.

The ruling on Thursday is likely to send shockwaves around the globe, where the glyphosate-containing herbicide Roundup is a mainstay of industrial agriculture.

In Colombia, there is an added political dimension stemming from the fierce debate that has raged over a program that has sprayed more than 4 million acres in the past two decades to kill coca plants, whose leaves are used to produce cocaine.

The fumigation program, which is financed by the U.S. and partly carried out by American contractors, has long been an irritant to Colombia's left, which likens it to the U.S. military's use of the Agent Orange herbicide during the Vietnam War. Ending Colombia's spraying program has also been a demand of leftist rebels negotiating with the government on an accord to end the country's half-century armed conflict.

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