

Viewpoint: Count the distortions — Organic industry-funded Carey Gillam misrepresents science and court decision to further obsessive campaign against weedkiller glyphosate

If glyphosate is such a deadly pesticide, why do activist groups have to lie about it? That's the question I asked myself after reading this [ridiculous article](#) written by Shannon Kelleher and Carey Gillam over at The New Lede.

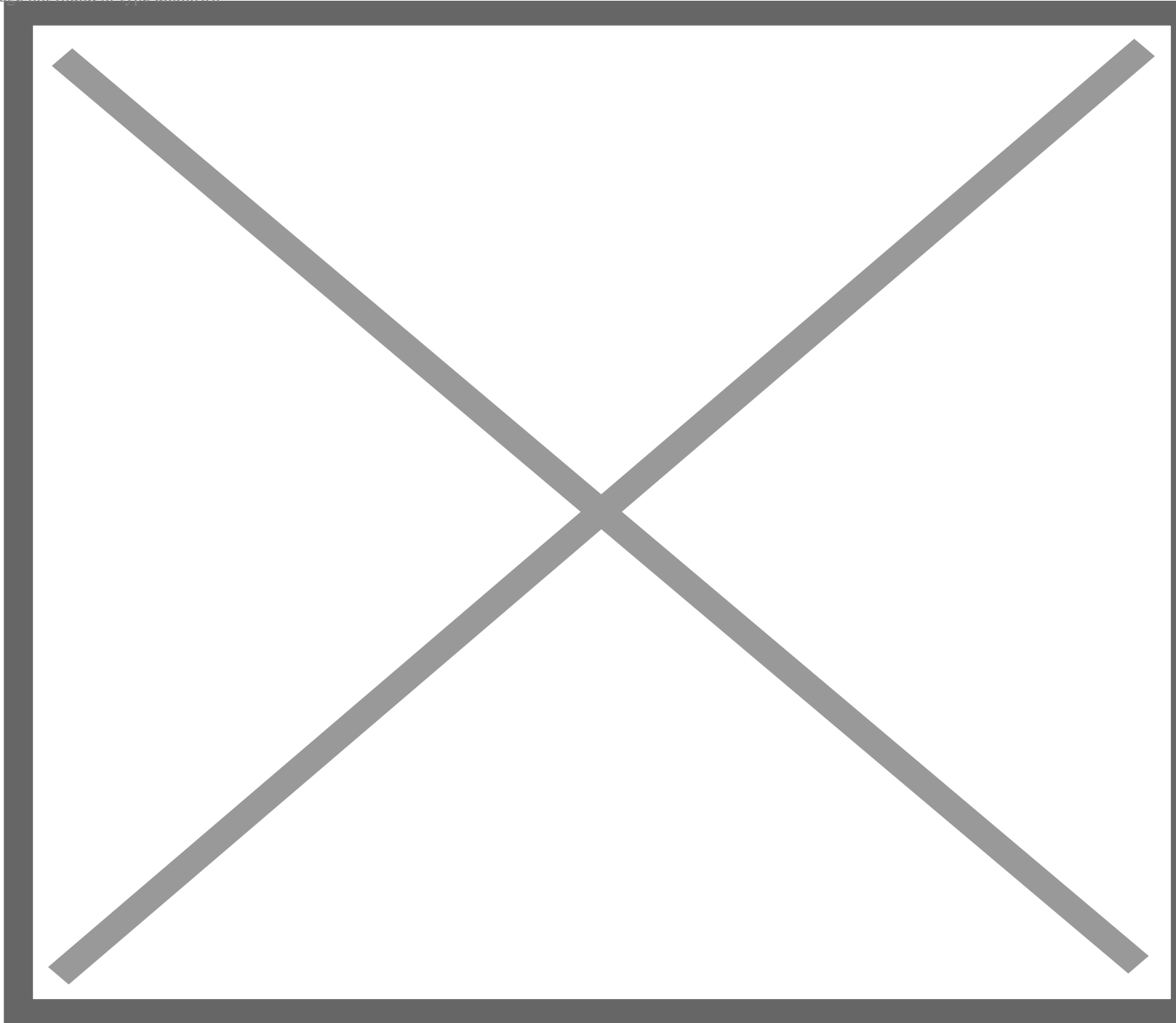
"US EPA to withdraw interim registration review decision for glyphosate," the headline declared. Sounds scandalous, but what does it actually mean? Kelleher and Gillam went on:

US regulators on Friday said they would [withdraw](#) all remaining portions of the interim registration review decision for the weed killer glyphosate.

The move comes after the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals issued an opinion saying the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) had violated the law in its assessment of glyphosate, which is the world's most widely used weed killer and the active ingredient in Roundup and numerous other herbicide products.

As we'll see, this is a serious exaggeration of the events. I counted four major errors in the story. Let's take them in turn.

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Carey Gillam. Credit: Heartland Health Research Alliance

What the EPA actually said

While it's true that the EPA withdrew its interim registration review in response to an order from a federal court, there's much more to the story. A handful of activist groups "challenged EPA's conclusions on human health and insisted that EPA should have followed the [Endangered Species Act's] procedural requirements before issuing the Interim Decision," [the court wrote](#).

We'll let the lawyers straighten out the procedural issues, but what of these "human health" concerns?

The Ninth Circuit [ruled that](#) EPA's conclusion that glyphosate probably isn't carcinogenic was "in tension with parts of the agency's own analysis (p 6)." As AgriPulse [reported in June](#):

In determining it could not come to a conclusion about the association between glyphosate exposure and [non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma], EPA's "cancer paper discussed human epidemiological studies showing what could be considered suggestive evidence that glyphosate exposure causes NHL."

However, "EPA discounted epidemiological studies showing increased NHL risk by concluding that 'chance and/or bias' could be 'an explanation for observed associations in the database,'" the court said.

The EPA [responded that](#) it "intends to revisit and better explain its evaluation of the carcinogenic potential of glyphosate and to consider whether to do so for other aspects of its human health analysis (p 6)." Crucially, however, the federal agency did not repudiate its finding that glyphosate is unlikely to cause cancer. The New Lede included this statement from the EPA, which, frankly, made the story a non-story:

EPA's underlying scientific findings regarding glyphosate, including its finding that glyphosate is not likely to be carcinogenic to humans, remain the same, Seralini the EPA said in a statement announcing its withdrawal of the glyphosate decision.

This invites an important question. Who's the authority on questions of pesticide safety, regulatory scientists or judges? As one commentator noted [about the court's ruling](#):

What would it have taken for the judges involved in this decision to determine there is substantial evidence to support the likely safety of glyphosate? More importantly, would they know it if they saw it?

I have my doubts, because the evidence is there for anybody to see. Agricultural glyphosate use has exploded in recent decades, yet this increase [has not led](#) to an uptick in NHL cases among farmers or pesticide applicators—those with the [highest exposure](#) to the weedkiller. As one cancer epidemiologist [put it](#), "there is no need for further study" of this chemical. That's the extent to which glyphosate has been scrutinized by independent experts. Anyone, federal judges included, who says the EPA's determination was inconsistent simply doesn't know the relevant science well enough.

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What about IARC's monograph?

Back to The New Lede:

Bayer ... said that the backing of the EPA and similar support from other regulators in other countries is more valid than a 2015 assessment by the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), which found that glyphosate was "probably" carcinogenic to humans.

Bayer is correct. IARC excluded evidence that would have invalidated its "probably carcinogenic" finding. [1] Statistician Dr. Robert Tarone has explained multiple times that the cancer agency badly botched its analysis of two rodent studies that were key to its conclusion. As he [told Congress in 2017](#):

...[M]y published paper notes other instances in which rodent tumor rates that supported the conclusion that glyphosate caused tumors were included in IARC deliberations while tumor rates from those same studies that did not support that conclusion were excluded. The systematic exclusion of exculpatory evidence is inexcusable, particularly when it's practiced by an influential source such as the IARC Monograph Programme. (p 78)

To appreciate how outrageous this is, imagine if Bayer or any other pesticide manufacturer had engaged in this sort of scientific chicanery instead of IARC. The cries of "[about the court's ruling](#)" would never end. Hollywood would turn the story into an Erin Brockovich sequel.

"Industry" studies

Kelleher and Gillam also asserted that

The IARC finding was based on a review of years of independent, peer-reviewed, published scientific studies. The reviews by the EPA and other regulators focused more heavily on unpublished and non peer-reviewed studies submitted to regulators by Monsanto and other companies ...

These industry-conducted studies [are mandated](#) by federal law and they have to meet [very exacting](#) standards. The companies had to do them and the EPA had to review them. It is incumbent upon private companies to demonstrate to federal regulators at the EPA, who are perfectly qualified to peer-review the research, that their products are safe to use.

The "corporate documents" gambit

... [I]nternal corporate documents show Monsanto has long been aware of research showing a connection between the weed killer and cancer, but has sought to bury such research and/or attack and censor scientists who insist there is evidence of a cancer risk.?

I was especially curious about this claim, so I dug through all the “internal documents” Monsanto was obligated to release several years ago. In one story for the Genetic Literacy Project (GLP), I explained that the communications between Monsanto’s scientists were [taken out of context](#); these documents flatly contradict Kelleher and Gillam’s allegation.

[screenshot pm](#)

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For instance, Gillam is fond of quoting [this 2003](#) email from a company scientist who told her colleague, “You cannot say that Roundup is not a carcinogen. We have not done the necessary testing on the

formulation to make that statement.” Now, here’s the second half of [the same quote](#):

We can make that statement about glyphosate and can infer that there is no reason to believe that Roundup would cause cancer.

What a difference twenty-two words make.

In a second piece co-authored with GLP executive director Jon Entine, we reported that Monsanto said [the same things](#) privately that independent scientists said publicly: IARC’s conclusion was nonsense based on cherry-picked evidence.

That leads to our final point: there was no conspiracy to “bury” studies linking glyphosate exposure to serious adverse effects. You can find [many such papers](#) with a few keystrokes. This research is dismissed by most experts [because it’s bad](#). For example, feeding lab rats massive doses of a pesticide, far more than humans are ever exposed to, is a waste of time, money.

The New Lede is lying to its readers by omitting all this information. Ignore their commentary and you’ll be far better informed about this important public health issue.

Notes:

[1] ACSH advisor Dr. Alex Berezow nicely summarized the situation in [Glyphosate-gate: IARC’s Scientific Fraud](#)

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