

Viewpoint: Activists shift tactics on glyphosate, attacking independent European science-oversight agencies that have unanimously found the herbicide safe

Glyphosate ate the world! Every single day another serious disease, from all types of cancer to Parkinson's, is attributed to this one chemical. Every environmental threat, from the bees to climate change, has been attributed to this one chemical. Although glyphosate has been widely used for over 50 years, we are only now learning how this one chemical has destroyed our planet and our ability to live on it. It's been detected in our air, in our urine, in our rainwater...

Run!!! ... Run fast!

This glyphysteria is like Reefer Madness 2.0 ... except these scaremongers all now want to legalise weed.

And the foundation and trust money keeps pouring in for more researchers, more NGOs, more events... This week, the Risk-Monger went to yet another Pesticide Action Network (PAN) [conference](#) in the European Parliament to ban glyphosate (once again funded by taxpayer money courtesy of the European Green Party) and the hysterics were getting a bit out of control. The title of the event, *Is Glyphosate Safe for Health and the Environment?* was in question form but who were the organisers kidding? They were dead certain this widely used pesticide was a killer, but their opponents were not the usual suspects.

Something has changed. The activists and their scientists were no longer cursing industry and their well-funded lobbyists and bought-and-paid-for scientists. No, no, no, ... Monsanto no longer lives and breathes so that scarecrow has become lost in the weeds. Activists could no longer win by terrifying regulators with unthinkable consequences if they were linked to some evil industry and their brown envelopes. These hyped-up activists needed a new tactic to win – a new Public Enemy #1 upon which to channel their hate. Today the fresh meat for their outrage frenzy is a new trinity of evil: The European Commission, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA).

Unlike industry, these new-found EU institutional piñatas are obliged to show up at such European Parliament circus events and they have to remain polite. So PAN orchestrated, on behalf of their European Parliament partners in the Green Party and the Socialists, the perfect slam of the other EU institutions involved in the glyphosate renewal process. The playbook is simple: have an event where they let the unsuspecting EU officials introduce what they did; then line up seven of their best activist scientists to relentlessly rip into them; and then give the officials two minutes to respond (but make sure to rudely cut them off). It was quite impressive (although, of course, ethically challenging).

Backstory

Glyphosate is an active ingredient in a widely used number of herbicides that have allowed farmers to control weeds for more than five decades. No longer protected by patents, it is cheap, has a low toxicity and is easy to use. Glyphosate is perhaps most reviled by environmentalists because it allows farmers to

use herbicide-tolerant GMO seeds with only one application well after germination. It also enables a more sustainable agriculture, with the ecological benefits of no-till farming and the use of a wide variety of cover crops to protect and regenerate the soil. Organic farmers have no equivalent substance that could come near this and yet be so environmentally benign.

This herbicide of the century transformed farming, and is still working quite well, but it also created enemies, uniting a consortium of far left anti-industry groups, the organic food industry lobby, development agroecologists, renegade scientists and anti-pesticide, anti-GMO NGO groups. American tort law firms used their financial resources and influence to construct and implement a strategy that would weave together these disparate groups into an alliance that would reap billions of dollars for them (and ban glyphosate thus making GMOs and conventional farming impractical).

Glyphosate peer review in numbers



32

Months
Dec. 2019 - Jul. 2023



180,000

Pages dossier



2,400

Total studies
assessed



400

Total entries received
from public consultation



27

National authorities



90

Experts appointed by
EU Member States
authorities

EFSA clearly did not do their work on glyphosate

In 2017, this “wolves among the lambs” strategy almost worked, but by sheer luck, the European Union renewed glyphosate for a further five years (since extended one further year). In this time, the activist alliance has hardened their approach, creating an onslaught of studies, films, campaigns and influencers to ensure that this simple chemical would never again be renewed. The glyphysterical narrative was entrenched within their tribe. The more articles they published, the more extreme their claims and the more certain they had become that there was no good reason to even consider renewing this poison... ever.

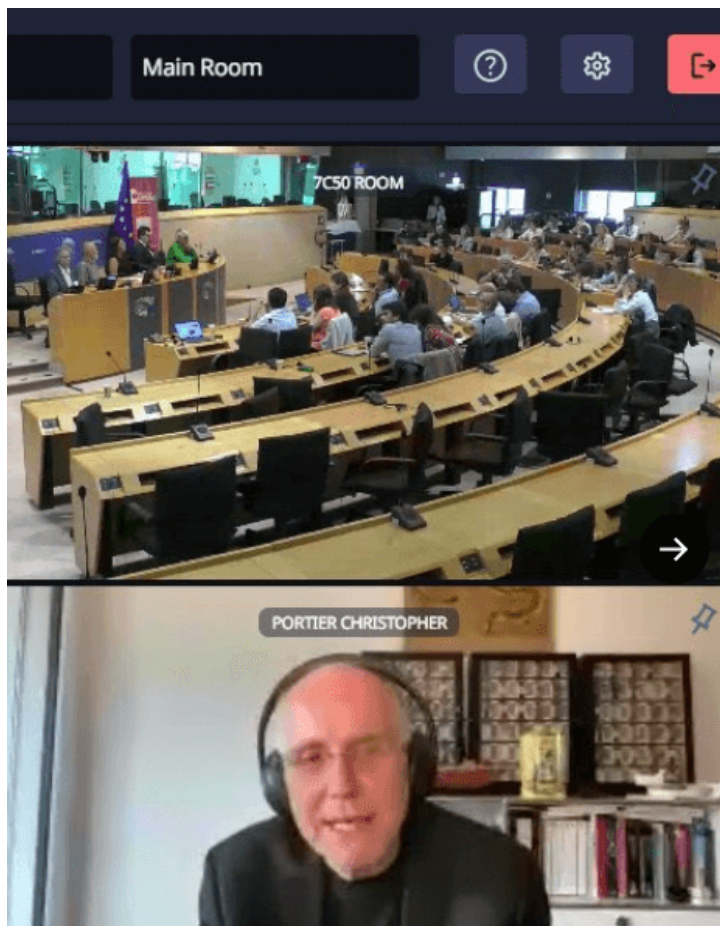
By the time the European Commission extended the glyphosate authorisation for a further year in 2022, after EFSA was overwhelmed by thousands of pages of research data, the activist consortium was growing hysterical in their anti-pesticide, anti-agriculture, anti-industry campaigns. But even as their well-funded echo-chambers were infused with self-affirming bias, not everyone was drinking their Kool-Aid.

ECHA did not find their onslaught of studies and publications to be so [convincing](#) and EFSA released a peer review of the [risk assessment](#) concluding that there were no critical areas of concern. On the basis of this advice, the European Commission has proposed to renew glyphosate for a further 15 years.

After NGOs had spent millions of other people’s money on building up a tsunami of outrage, I suspect they were not expecting the challenge to come from those easily malleable, respectful-by-duty civil servants. It was time for the activists to unleash their rottweilers, but this time on those who were supposed to save them: EU officials.

It was time for The Risk-Monger to make some more popcorn, once again leave his dusty basement and go to the European Parliament to watch the circus.

The sting operation



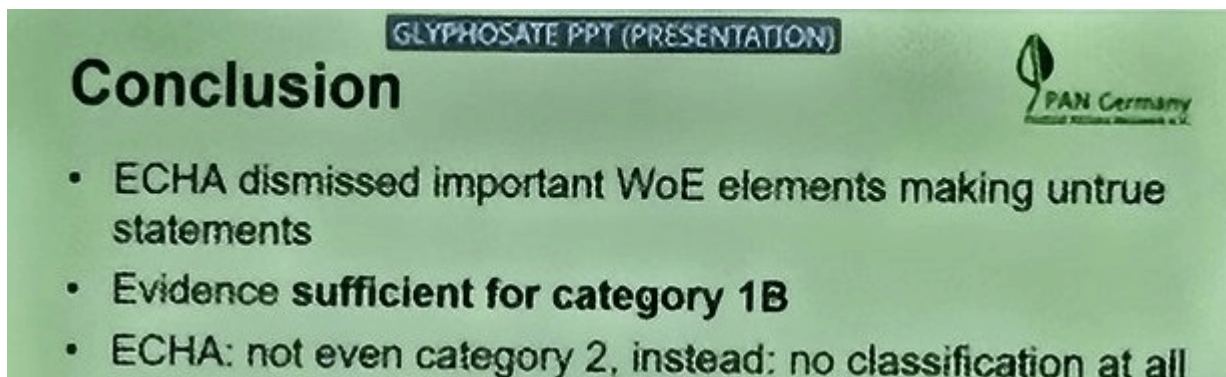
Even PAN can't fill the room

I knew it was going to be a surreal day when I arrived at the European Parliament in Brussels. The sponsoring MEP's staff member distributing the badges was smoking (OK, David, be polite ... he's probably very stressed out by the presence of glyphosate in the air). The room was about 25% full (including the 12 speakers and at least five organisers).

PAN's strategy was methodical. The first step was to get a speaker each from ECHA, EFSA and the European Commission to explain their role in the glyphosate reauthorisation process and try to justify their decisions. The officials were respectful and sympathetic to the activists' position but signs of a trap should have been obvious before the European Commission DG Santé head of unit for pesticides, Klaus Berend, started to speak. In his introduction, MEP Christophe Clergeau forced Klaus to affirm his commitment to the precautionary principle – Klaus did indeed bend the knee, but then reminded the audience that it's the Commission and the Member States who are the "risk managers" ... touché.

Then came Step Two of the glyphosate sting: the activist science offensive. PAN brought out their heavy hitters to systematically discredit this institutional trinity of evil.

- The attack started with old faithful, **Chris Portier**, the last man in America standing between juries and Predator billions. A good part of his speech was an attempt to trash any studies that challenged his argument that glyphosate was a probable carcinogen. Concluding that he is the only one who is right, and EFSA and ECHA are clearly wrong, the chemical could only be classified in CLP as 1B. Chris was cut short though before he could get to his two-legged stool argument (after having spent too much of his allotted time talking about himself).
- **Peter Clausing** from PAN brought up issues that EFSA had already addressed but then played into the prepared narrative of how oxidative stress is the new game-changer for banning glyphosate. It seemed that only the Risk-Monger winced when the angry scientist accused EFSA and ECHA of making untrue statements, ie, lying. EU officials have to remain respectful, but Peter only had one finger visible on his hand. I get it ... It's a long flight to Helsinki ... all for nothing.
- Then came the activist NGO darling, **Daniele Mandrioli**, travelling in from the Ramazzini Institute in Italy. He could only talk about the preliminary results from his infamous pilot study on glyphosate (again) while promising big results from his main study. Daniele then, once again, did his best Miss Congeniality impression, asking the room for money to support his independent science.
- **Michael Antoniou**, from Kings College, was next up. He started with an appeal to the urgency to act now: *"People's lives and the environment are at stake"*. He focused on the results of his study on the co-formulants of Roundup (done with the Ramazzini Institute and funded by the Sustainable Food Alliance) and all of the cancers they might cause. Oh yes, and oxidative stress. Michael stayed on script in his appeal for common sense asking: *"When will regulators come out of the Dark Ages?"*



PAN's Peter Clausing accusing ECHA of lying. He was never that rough on Monsanto.

The activist strategy then shifted from scientists proving cancer in humans were all caused by glyphosate to those demonstrating how this single chemical was the greatest all-time threat to the environment.

- First up was **Johann Zaller** from the University of Vienna. He started with arguments of how glyphosate was the main cause of the loss of biodiversity, how it stimulates invasive species and is the cause for the destructive practice of monocropping. Also, like all synthetic pesticides, glyphosate is made from fossil fuels and therefore, they emit greenhouse gases (so glyphosate causes climate

change). Then he listed a litany of threats from the effects on DNA in birds, insects and bees ... oh yes, and oxidative stress. Glyphosate is the new DDT, found in ambient air kilometres away from where it might have been applied. As he concluded with a rapid click on a study on how glyphosate impairs the nutrient content in grape juice and wine (Ouch!) I noticed that I was the only one in the room who was alarmed by the extent that glyphosate has destroyed the world. These hysterics are what activists have been consuming on the daily, and they believe it.

- **Xavier Reboud** from INRAE, France, talked about alternatives to glyphosate, concluding that removing herbicides would lead to no difference at all for farmers long term (but would be so much better for the environment). We already knew all of this because the Green Party had already paid PAN Europe to produce a [report](#) and hold a conference to prove this fact. Reboud said that farmers simply need better education. In other words, farmers who use glyphosate are stupid.

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Time for some healthy discussion?

With ten minutes left before the room needed to be cleared for the next event, there was one last activist science speaker before the ECHA, EFSA and European Commission officials could respond to the 85 minutes of relentless attacks and abuse. That was the PAN organiser, Angeliki Lysimachou. She employed the well-known NGO tactic of letting the clock run out so that opponents would have no time to refute the claims from the activist script. As she was rambling on incomprehensibly, even the moderator, Green MEP Jutta Paulus, aware of the noise from the crowd outside, tried to get her to conclude. She still went on, leaving only four minutes for the EU officials to defend their actions.

- In his short response, the ECHA official, Paul Ryan, served up some brilliant waffle: "*Everything has already been said and heard before and we stand by our assessment*".
- The EFSA official, Manuela Tiramani, was clearly annoyed and felt these activist scientists and their NGO paymasters needed a good shake. She reiterated how EFSA had looked at all of the studies ... including theirs. She accused PAN of continuing to bang on about genotoxicity "*but it is just not so*". She told them to provide further information if they have any. She then took aim at Ramazzini saying that EFSA had engaged with them, asking for some preliminary results but had no reply, lamenting the lost opportunity (Risk-Monger note: EFSA cannot give Daniele any money so any contact was futile). The moderator interrupted Dr Tiramani as she was schooling the room on how exposure studies are supposed to be done. She concluded by expressing how frustrated she was on the lack of time the organisers had given her to respond. This must have been her first activist NGO event in the Parliament because this happens all of the time. Only one person in the room applauded the EFSA official for her passionate appeal for sanity (and the entire room turned and stared at me).
- Klaus Berend, from the European Commission, was polite but the doors had already opened and people were coming into the room for the next event.

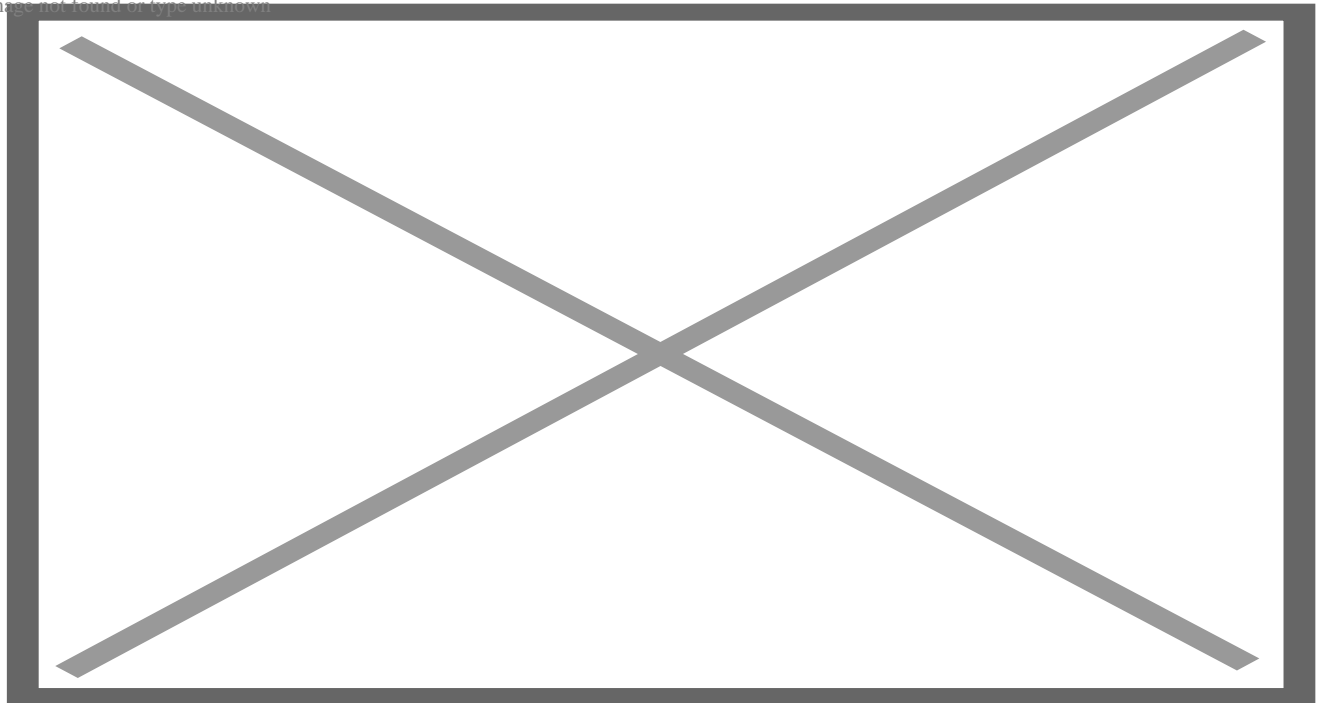
The EU officials got a taste of activist outrage usually reserved for those hated industry lobbyists.

Is this a new NGO-Green Party-Socialist-Left strategy to openly attack European institutions? In June of this year, the European parties held their conferences to strategise for the European elections next May. Will the parties on the Left set their guns on the unelected EU officials among them? This is a bit of a burning door strategy since any outrage raised toward those EU institutions will fly back in their faces. If glyphosate is approved next month, as the European Commission recommends based on advice from their scientists in ECHA and EFSA, this will be a banner for the left-wing militants to bang their drums on come election time. Trust in EU institutions will be further eroded and for what ... a couple angry protest votes?

Postscript: The citizen action to #StopGlyphosate

PAN invited everyone in the Parliament to the “Citizen Action to #StopGlyphosate”, taking place in front of the European Parliament half an hour after the conference. The Risk-Monger was very excited to attend and raise his fist, especially after reading all of the Eko (formerly SumOfUs) email appeals for funding for this great #StopGlyphosate event. With the hundreds of thousands of euros Eko likely raised, he was hoping to get some sandwiches ... if he could battle through the masses of angry, outraged citizens.

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A protest of photographers

When he got there, he found some well-organised activists handing out signs about the evils of glyphosate (in all languages). There were speeches and cheering but not too many citizens. There were

only around 35 people at the demonstration but all of them seemed to be working for the NGOs organising the event or for the few MEPs who came to speak. There appeared to be no citizens (except the Risk-Monger) and no promised Eko sandwiches. Was it all a ruse?

I have frequently argued that activist demands for increased use of citizen panels or citizen assemblies was not an appeal for direct democracy and public engagement. It is their attempt to get decisions made by an unaccountable minority of their own interest groups posing as citizen action committees. They cite their numbers as justification for a louder voice in the policy process, but they are never more representative than a fraction of one percent of the European population. These fabricators are a dangerous mob to cede power to.

Among the 35 in the well-spread crowd, I counted six photographers busily clicking away for their clients, who would make use of this event for their social media posts and next PR campaign where they could claim to be representing the voice of the citizen. One of the photographers was the only person from Eko who showed up, getting some shots to assure their micro-donors how they ("Us") won again.

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So it was Eko (SumOfUs) who organised this "massive demonstration" (with just one activist)

So Eko spent nothing on this event. I recalled the disclaimer in their email to me noting that if they raised more money than needed, they would spend it on other campaigns.

"Anything extra raised will power Ek? and our campaigns worldwide fighting for people and the planet."

What a band of misleading, non-transparent charlatans.

Before the crowd could start to sing their songs, the skies opened up and a heavy rain purified the Place Luxembourg for the next citizens group to come and have a rally. The 35 quickly became 15 and the Risk-Monger [showed](#) this ragtag mob what commitment to the cause really means.

Who will be left for them to hate once the glyphysteria passes?

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