

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tainted science used to justify continued use of pesticide linked to cancer

'Monsanto papers' suggest some studies Canada used to okay glyphosate use were biased

OTTAWA – With the recent revelation that Monsanto allegedly manipulated studies on glyphosate, health and environmental groups are calling on the federal government to carefully consider the notorious 'Monsanto papers' as it deliberates the future of the chemical's use in Canada.

"Some of the studies and publications Health Canada relied on to approve the continued use of glyphosate in Canada have been implicated in alleged misconduct by the chemical giant, Monsanto," said Dr. Elaine MacDonald, Healthy Communities director at Ecojustice. "The question now is whether Canada will choose to turn a blind eye to this fact and continue to rely on this research to justify exposing Canadians to products that could cause cancer."

In August 2018, a California jury found that glyphosate contributed to an American citizen's cancer. Lawyers for the man suing Monsanto released internal Monsanto documents — known as the Monsanto papers — which they claim show that Monsanto knowingly manipulated scientific research and publications, and downplayed the cancer-risks of its glyphosate-based products for years.

Health Canada relied on this research in 2017 when it re-evaluated and approved the continued use of glyphosate in Canada for another 15 years — a decision that has been challenged by Ecojustice lawyers, acting on behalf of Canadian Physicians for the Environment (CAPE), the David Suzuki Foundation, Environmental Defence, Équiterre and Prevent Cancer Now.

Ecojustice lawyers submitted a letter to the Minister of Health, urging her to consider the documents from the 'Monsanto papers' and to strike an independent review panel to re-consider its decision to continue to allow the widespread use of glyphosate based products.

Glyphosate has been categorized as a "probable human carcinogen" by the World Health Organization's (WHO) International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC).

In addition to human health impacts, scientist have also linked heavy glyphosate in genetically modified corn and soybean fields to decrease availability of flowering plants and milkweed, the primary food source for Monarch larvae. Less flowers and less milkweed means fewer Monarch butterflies and pollinators.

"You don't have to look very far to find glyphosate. It can be found in our food, our drinking water and in playgrounds in many parts of Canada," said Muhannad Malas, toxics program manager at Environmental Defence. "The fact that it appears that Health Canada has relied on research manipulated by Monsanto undermines the credibility of its scientific assessment and the public confidence in its decision to continue allowing the use of this highly controversial pesticide."

Additional quotes:

Dr. Warren Bell, CAPE Board Member, said: "It appears that Monsanto has acted to suppress evidence about the harm associated with glyphosate and Roundup, which makes it imperative that the PMRA re-examines, openly and transparently, its recent regulatory decision. The health of Canadians cannot be adequately protected without such a re-examination."

Louise Hénault-Ethier, Science Projects Manager at the David Suzuki Foundation, said: "The reason for filing a notice of objection on the registration of glyphosate was initially justified by the fact that the PMRA had unfortunately overlooked recent scientific evidence on glyphosate environmental and health toxicity. However, some conclusions of the PMRA are in direct contradiction with scientific consensus. It is now simply shocking to learn that the PMRA may have relied on allegedly manipulated scientific evidence."

Meg Sears, Chair of Prevent Cancer Now, notes: "An independent working group for the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) concluded that glyphosate probably causes cancer, yet Health Canada concluded the opposite."

"The Monsanto Papers show how the chemical giant may have played a part in the PMRA's rejection of IARC's conclusion. This illustrates the need for Canadian regulators to consider more carefully the scientific evidence they rely on, to register chemicals for use in Canada."

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The Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment (CAPE) is a physician directed non-profit organization that seeks to improve human health by protecting the planet.

Founded in 1990, the David Suzuki Foundation is a national, bilingual non-profit organization working with evidence-based research, education and policy analysis, to conserve and protect the natural environment, and help create a sustainable Canada.

Ecojustice, Canada's largest environmental law charity, goes to court to defend nature, combat climate change, and fight for a healthy environment for all.

Environmental Defence is Canada's most effective environmental action organization. We challenge, and inspire change in government, business and people to ensure a greener, healthier and prosperous life for all.

Prevent Cancer Now works to stop cancer before it starts, by addressing contributors to cancer, with strong science, advocacy and public education.

Media materials:

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For more information please contact:

To arrange an interview, please contact:

Catharine Tunnacliffe, Communications Manager | Ecojustice
416 368-7533 x: 542 | ctunnacliffe@ecojustice.ca