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Glyphosate: Carcinogenic or not?

The EFSA tries to defend its wrong assessment of glyphosate's carcinogenic hazard – again with arbitrary arguments, criticises the Pesticide Action Network

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) was established to assess pesticides on a purely scientific basis. In case of glyphosate the EFSA abandoned that path in an attempt to “whitewash” this pesticide using arbitrary arguments. That is the conclusion drawn by toxicologist Dr. Peter Clausing of the Pesticide Action Network (PAN) Germany. In his letter of 13 January 2016 (1), EFSA's Chief Executive Bernhard Url tries to justify wrong statistical methods using spurious arguments to insist that observed carcinogenic effects in mouse studies are inexistent. PAN German and PAN Europe have subjected these arguments to a critical evaluation (2).

The approach to the statistical evaluation of mouse studies is fundamental for the assessment of the carcinogenic hazard of glyphosate. Using the statistical methods recommended by OECD all five mouse studies exhibit significant carcinogenic effects. Bernhard Url justifies EFSA's ignorance concerning the OECD recommendations using spurious arguments.

„These arguments have no scientific basis“, Clausing says. The EFSA takes refuge behind the requirement to define the method of statistical evaluation prior to study start suggesting that later changes are impossible. “Because the quality of the data becomes clear only after study completion it is possible, and sometimes even necessary to change the statistical method, which of course needs to be documented and the reason needs to be described“, says Clausing.

According to PAN Germany and PAN Europe, the EFSA needs to apply the most recent recommendations by the OECD, instead of hiding behind decades old study plans. In addition Url repeats old arguments of the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) concerning an alleged lack of biological relevance of the carcinogenicity studies, arguments which have been criticized earlier (3, 4).

It is of urgency that the European Commission takes serious note of the critique of EFSA's arguments and takes necessary action for the protection of people and the environment. Hopefully, the meeting between Commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis and Professor Portier and other scientists on 22 January 2016 will contribute to that. Professor Portier and 96 other renowned scientists from all over the world urged the EU Commissioner in an open letter (5), to ensure that the assessment of glyphosate is performed on a purely scientific basis.

(389 words / 2587 characters incl. blanks)

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Further Information:

- (1) Response EFSA's chief executive, Bernhard Url, of 13 Jan 2016 to the open letter by Prof. Portier et al. http://www.efsa.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EFSA_response_Prof_Portier.pdf
- (2) Repeating wrong statements does not make them more correct - , A comment on the answer of EFSA's Chief Executive, Bernhard Url, to the open letter of Prof. Christopher Portier http://www.pan-germany.org/download/EFSA_Response_Analysis_160120.pdf
- (3) http://www.pan-germany.org/download/PAN_Germany_Addendum_analysis_09112015.pdf
- (4) http://www.pan-germany.org/download/Analysis_EFSA-Conclusion_151201.pdf
- (5) Open letter of Prof. Christopher Portier and Co-signees to EU-commissioner Vytenis Andriukaitis of 27 Nov. 2015 http://www.greenpeace.org/eu-unit/Global/eu-unit/reports-briefings/2015/Glyphosate%20letter%20with%20logos_29102015.pdf