

Monsanto pesticide unlikely to cause cancer, UN review finds

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The weed-killing pesticide glyphosate, made by Monsanto and widely used in agriculture and by gardeners, probably does not cause cancer, according to a new safety review by United Nations health, agriculture and food experts.

In a statement likely to intensify a row over its potential health impact, experts from the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and World Health Organization (WHO) said glyphosate is "unlikely to pose a carcinogenic risk to humans" exposed to it through food. It is mostly used on crops.

Having reviewed the scientific evidence, the joint WHO/FAO committee also said glyphosate is unlikely to be genotoxic in humans. In other words, it is not likely to have a destructive effect on cells' genetic material.

The conclusion contradicts a finding by the WHO's Lyon, France-based International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), which in March, 2015, said glyphosate is "probably" able to cause cancer in humans and classified it as a so-called Group 2A carcinogen.

Seven months after the IARC review, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), an independent agency funded by the European Union, published a different assessment, saying glyphosate is "unlikely to pose a carcinogenic hazard to humans."

The differing findings thrust glyphosate into the centre of a row involving EU and U.S. politicians and regulators, the IARC experts, environmental and agricultural specialists and the WHO.

Diazinon and malathion, two other pesticides reviewed by the WHO/FAO committee, which met last week and issued its conclusions in a statement on Monday, were also found to be unlikely to be carcinogenic.