

# The politics of health protection and glyphosates in the forest

Written by Inka Milewski on August 2, 2016

If someone told you that being exposed to lead in the food you eat, the water you drink or the air you breathe would not increase your risk of cancer but failed to tell you that these exposures could result in developmental, cognitive and behavioural effects in children and neurological, blood, and kidney effects in adults, would you feel safe?

That is the message the acting Chief Medical Officer of Health is giving New Brunswickers in her recently released report on glyphosate.

While the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health (OCMOH) waits and follows the worldwide debate on whether glyphosate is cancer-causing or not, her report completely ignores the discussion taking place in the scientific community on the other known health effects of glyphosate.

There is extensive research and a growing body of scientific publications that have reported damage to DNA, malformations of embryos and fetus, damage to cells, endocrine-disrupting and/or effects on enzymes associated with glyphosate and its additives in a wide range of species including humans.

A [consensus statement](#) published this year in the journal *Environmental Health* by a dozen leading scientists and epidemiologists concluded that “regulatory estimates of tolerable daily intakes for glyphosate in the United States and European Union are based on outdated science.” They offer an extensive critique and a series of recommendations related to the need for new investments in epidemiological studies, biomonitoring, and toxicology studies to examine the impacts of glyphosate on the human endocrine system – a system that controls virtually every function in the body including growth and development, sexual development, reproduction, sleep, and behaviour.

The New Brunswick OCMOH’s report on glyphosate is little more than a re-hash of what anyone with a computer can find on their own – media stories, reports from the Pest Management Regulatory Agency and other provinces, and responses to the conclusion by the International Agency for Research on Cancer that glyphosate is a probable carcinogen. The OCMOH has concluded there is no increased risk for New Brunswickers exposed to glyphosate without providing a shred of actual New Brunswick-based exposure-response data or other epidemiological research.

The current body of science is clearly not large enough for Health Canada and the Pest Management Regulatory Agency or the New Brunswick Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health. The history of these and other agencies not acting in a precautionary manner to protect

public and environmental health in the face of mounting evidence is, however, quite long and shameful.

In her widely acclaimed 2007 book, *The Secret History of the War on Cancer*, Dr. Devra Davis, founding director of the Board on Environmental Studies and Toxicology of the US National Academy of Sciences, explained in great detail how industry-funded efforts have led to the evolution of the science of doubt promotion. Virtually every industrial chemical is backed by a concerted and well-funded industry association that identifies, magnifies and exaggerates the inherent uncertainties in toxicology and epidemiological studies as a way of delaying regulatory action.

Over many decades, the public and regulators were told by the manufacturers of pesticides such as 2,4,5-T (otherwise known as Agent Orange), DDT, chlordane, and fenitrothion that they were safe. We were told these chemicals were “unlikely to affect your health when used according to label directions”. Eventually, regulatory agencies decided they were unsafe.

Just how much science will be enough for the New Brunswick Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health to declare glyphosate unsafe for human and environmental health?

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