



Toxicologist critical of 'dodgy science' in glyphosate bans

ABC Rural

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PHOTO: Toxicologists worry fear over glyphosate are founded on bad science, as The Netherlands prepares for a ban by the end of 2015. (Rose Grant: ABC Rural)

MAP: [Sydney 2000](#)

By the end of 2015, gardeners in the Netherlands will not be able to buy the common herbicide, glyphosate.

The Netherlands joins Sri Lanka and El Salvador in banning glyphosate, with pressure from interest groups mounting in other countries.

The backyard ban coincides with a World Health Organisation ruling that it probably causes cancer.

But Australian toxicologist Dr Ian Musgrave said the ban flies in the face of good science, as glyphosate (commonly sold as Roundup) is ranked 2A, lower than alcoholic beverages and formaldehyde, which are class one proven carcinogens.

"Glyphosate is a fairly non-toxic chemical to humans," he said.

"In fact, if you tried to get the concentrations we see in animal studies, you'd have to eat something like a half a kilogram of glyphosate a day.

"If you tried to eat the same amount of sodium chloride, table salt, you'd be very sick indeed."

Dr Musgrave said the WHO ruling did not release the study behind its findings, and it came as a surprise to toxicologists in Europe.

"The European toxicology panel realised in 2014 an extensive review of the carcinogenicity and toxicity of glyphosate coming to the conclusion that there is no substantial cancer risk," he said.

A web search turns up dozens of articles of health concern about glyphosate, which Dr Musgrave debunks.

"The chronic kidney disease found in parts of Sri Lanka is due to arsenic found in the phosphate fertiliser they're using, nothing to do with glyphosate," he said.

"The idea there might be human birth defects is due to a study where they soaked frog eggs in concentrate of glyphosate that were 11,000 times higher than are present in the environment.

"We should be basing our use of any chemical, be it herbicide or a drug on good science.

"And a lot of what people are reacting to is stuff that has been disproven."

Dr Musgrave said he worried that governments were responding to fear about glyphosate causing Parkinson's disease.

"It doesn't," he said.

"The largest agricultural study in the United States found no link between Hodgkin's disease and glyphosate.

"There are about 14 long-term animal studies with rats, showing no link between glyphosate and any form of significant disease."

In toxicology there is a saying 'it's the dose that makes the poison, even table salt is toxic in the right concentrations.'

Dr Musgrave is speaking at the 2015 National Horticultural Convention on the Gold Coast, Queensland on 25-27th June..

He is in the Great Debate, about whether "The benefits of organic produce outweigh those benefits grown in conventional methods".