

A \$289M Hit Job on Science in Jackpot Verdict on Monsanto's Glyphosate



By Alex Berezow — August 16, 2018



Credit: Storyblocks [1]

Jurors in California have awarded \$289 million to a man who claimed that his cancer was due to Monsanto's herbicide glyphosate, even though that is biologically impossible. Even the judge acknowledged that there was no evidence of harm. Yet, trial lawyers manipulated a jury's emotions and the public's misunderstanding of science to score another jackpot verdict.

The plaintiff, Dewayne Johnson, claims that glyphosate gave him non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, a cancer that occurs when the immune system goes awry. There are three major problems with this claim.

First, as stated above, glyphosate does not cause cancer because it does not harm humans. It is an herbicide, so it is only toxic to plants. There is no known biological mechanism by which glyphosate could cause cancer, therefore its carcinogenicity is not even theoretically possible. That is why there isn't a single reputable public health agency that believes glyphosate causes cancer. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the World Health Organization, and the European Food Safety Authority all reject claims of any link.

The only organization of note that rejects this scientific consensus is a group within the World Health Organization called the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). Contrary to all evidence, the group insists that glyphosate causes cancer – along with bacon and hot water.*

The truth is that IARC is a fringe outlier, staunchly ideological rather than scientific, and rife with financial conflicts of interest. Christopher Portier, a special adviser to the IARC working group that examined glyphosate, [was also working](#) [2] for the activist organization Environmental Defense Fund and [received \\$160,000 from trial lawyers](#) [3] who stood to profit handsomely if IARC declared

glyphosate a carcinogen because they could file in lawsuit-happy sue California. IARC's credibility has been so thoroughly shattered that [Congress recently pulled its funding](#) [4].

Second, though the root cause of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma is unknown, that does not mean its etiology is completely open to speculation. Lymphomas originate from white blood cells, so scientists believe that autoimmune disease or chronic infections play a role. Just because the plaintiff's attorneys can fool a jury into believing that glyphosate causes non-Hodgkin's lymphoma doesn't mean there is any scientific evidence.

Third, [glyphosate](#) [5] has been off-patent for 18 years, and about 40% of the world's glyphosate is made in China. So, why pick on Monsanto when several different companies could have supplied the glyphosate the plaintiff used?

The truth is, this decision against Monsanto is just the latest in a series of jackpot verdicts taking aim at some of America's largest companies. Johnson & Johnson just lost a \$4.7-billion lawsuit over an equally scientifically impossible claim that baby powder causes ovarian cancer. Another lawsuit aimed at coffee companies tried to get their product labeled as carcinogenic, despite well-documented evidence that [coffee helps prevent breast, colorectal, colon, endometrial, and prostate cancers](#) [6].

The reason that legal arguments consistently trump scientific evidence is because we live in a thoroughly postmodern world. Logic and data have been replaced by emotion and virtue signaling. When a culture believes that truth is simply a matter of opinion, science is among the first casualties. America will not remain #1 in the world for scientific research if we continue to allow lawyers to bleed companies dry over crimes they never committed.

**Note: This article was written in collaboration with ACSH President Hank Campbell. He likes to note that British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli said in the 1800s, "There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics." There's much truth to that statement, especially in cases like this.*

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[4] https://www.science20.com/news_staff/congress_pulls_funding_for_iarc_statistics_organization-233610

[5] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2017/03/15/glyphosate-nyts-danny-hakim-lying-you-11001>

[6] <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/abs/10.1146/annurev-nutr-071816-064941>