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La Crosse kills Roundup as weed-killer after complaints

Jourdan Vian La Crosse Tribune Sep 2, 2019

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Kristy DuChateau and her daughter Josie, 4, play together Monday at the playground at the South Community Library. The city of La Crosse Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department will no longer use herbicides like Roundup after a group of concerned citizens, including DuChateau, suggested alternatives.

Peter Thomson, La Crosse Tribune

Roundup kills weeds, but after evidence connected it to cancer and raised concerns among local community members, La Crosse will no longer be using it in city parks.

The La Crosse Parks, Recreation and Forestry Department switched to an organic compound known as Finalsan after a group of local women, including Pam Hartwell, Kristy Du Chateau and Noelle Weber Strauss, asked the department to reconsider using Roundup, Bayer AG's glyphosate-based weed killer.

The idea grew out of a Facebook post about Roundup that got the women talking about people getting sick from it and what sorts of things local people can do to prevent its use where it could potentially harm people or the environment.

A federal judge in California — Alameda County Superior Court Judge Winifred Y. Smith — ruled in July that Monsanto, the parent company of Bayer and Roundup, made efforts to impede scientific inquiry into whether the herbicide was safe for humans, after a jury awarded a couple that blamed Roundup for their non-Hodgkin's lymphoma \$2 billion in a federal lawsuit. Smith lowered the judgment to \$86.7 million, but wrote in the July 25 order, "The evidence was disputed, but there is substantial evidence to support the jury's findings that glyphosate can cause NHL and did cause each of the plaintiffs to develop NHL."

Bayer has lost three U.S. jury trials connected to Roundup and is appealing the decisions.

Bayer denied any safety concerns tied to Roundup in a statement to the Tribune.

"There is no evidence that local municipalities who choose to move away from glyphosate for amenity weed management are enhancing safety. Leading health regulators around the world have repeatedly concluded that Bayer's glyphosate-based herbicides can be used safely as directed and that glyphosate is not carcinogenic, based on an extensive body of science spanning more than 40 years, including more than 100 studies EPA considered relevant to its cancer risk analysis, and more than 800 safety studies overall submitted to regulators," said a Bayer spokesperson.

Bayer said studies including the National Cancer Institute-supported Agricultural Health Study, the 2019 Leon Agricoh Consortium study and the 2019 North American Pooled Project support its positions.

“Significantly, the largest and most recent epidemiology studies, which are the most relevant research for assessing exposure effects in the human population, each found that there was no association between glyphosate-based herbicides and NHL overall in real-world use when adjusted for the use of other pesticides,” said Bayer.

The federal judge determined Monsanto conducted studies about glyphosate, then didn’t pursue it further when it showed there was cause for concern.

“In this case there was clear and convincing evidence that Monsanto made efforts to impede, discourage, or distort scientific inquiry and the resulting science,” Smith wrote.



Four-year-old Josie DuChateau plays Monday at the playground at the South Community Library. DuChateau’s mother, Kristy, was among a group of concerned citizens that convinced the city of La Crosse to stop using herbicides.

Peter Thomson, La Crosse Tribune

Local parents aren’t convinced Roundup is safe.

Du Chateau likes to take her daughter outside and keeping her away from areas that had been sprayed, including those where they set up the flags warning people, was a challenge.

“They’re not as aware as an adult. A white flag doesn’t mean anything to her,” she said.

With Du Chateau being a garden educator at Spence Elementary School who avoids the use of toxic chemicals, she was well-aware of the alternatives available.

Ultimately, they decided to take it to the city’s parks department to see if they’d consider changing up which herbicide they use.

“Why not go ask why we can’t do this?” Hartwell said. “It never hurts to ask.”

According to Trussoni, the city had used Roundup on sidewalk cracks, in parks, around fence lines and sometimes in the median of roads like West and Copeland avenues. They deliberately avoided using it around water.

Hartwell, the former director of Hillview Urban Agricultural Center, and Du Chateau were blown away by how willing Odegaard and Trussoni were to try something else.

“He was so willing to hear us. He was very receptive to what we had to say,” Du Chateau said.

Trussoni said they had also heard of the lawsuit involving Roundup, so it didn't take much convincing to try an alternative.

"In an attempt to do what's best for the community, we thought 'Why not? Let's give it a shot,'" Trussoni said.

The plan is to try out Finalsan for a year and see whether the city needs to make some more adjustments, he said.

So far, it's not as effective, requiring the city to spray 10 or so times in areas where Roundup would take weeds down with one treatment.

"It'll kill the weed that it's sprayed on it, it won't kill anything around it," Trussoni said.

The city will revisit the decision next year, possibly looking into other organic compounds, he said.

"It really was a very easy win and a nice opportunity to start the conversation on what kind of herbicides and pesticides we use in the city of La Crosse and in our schools," Hartwell said.

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