

Talking about Glyphosate

Communication Guide for Natural Resource Managers

Herbicides are one important tool in the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) toolkit for natural resource managers dealing with invasive plants. Glyphosate is a widely-used herbicide and currently the focus of significant public attention. This handout is designed to support land managers in talking about herbicide use and about glyphosate in particular.

Risk	All management actions come with some level of risk to workers, wildlife and the public. Inaction also comes with the risk that invasive plants will damage natural resources. Our decisions are about risk reduction.
Regulation	In California, the state’s Environmental Protection Agency determines which herbicides can and cannot be used in the state. These regulations are science-based and build upon federal regulations from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Glyphosate was registered for use in the 1970s and earlier this year was reaffirmed for general use.
Uses	Glyphosate is widely used for agriculture and landscaping by both professionals and homeowners. These uses are orders of magnitude larger than use for invasive plant management in wildlands.
Concerns	Given the widespread use of glyphosate, there is concern that exposure may be harmful. The science has become politicized, with concerns that both industry and activists may be bending results to fit their interests. Recent lawsuits have successfully convinced juries to award damages to plaintiffs who believe that they developed cancer as a result of long-term use of glyphosate during their work as landscapers.
Carcinogenicity	In 2015, the international Agency for the Research of Cancer (IARC) categorized glyphosate as a “2A–probable carcinogen,” joining other synthetic and naturally-occurring chemicals as well as things like red meat and working the night shift. This means it can cause cancer in laboratory conditions which may not match real-world exposure. The World Health Organization subsequently determined that glyphosate is unlikely to pose a public health concern for dietary exposure.

DISCUSSION TIPS

Recognize concerns

Though people may have a different understanding of the situation than you do, it is important to respectfully listen to their point of view and recognize their sincere concerns. Let them know that you, too, are concerned about having a clean environment and safe working conditions.

Show empathy

This issue is emotional. Facts and data are not always helpful when dealing with fear and anger. Engage your empathy in order to truly understand what is at the core of people's concerns and don't rush to defend your point of view.

Allow choice

A sense of lacking a choice about a perceived risk elevates anyone's level of concern. Allow everyone to have the opportunity to make choices as a stakeholder. This is important for community support for stewardship, period.

Share personal connection

Share your name and ask for others' names. Using names can help respect each other as individuals. Ask questions to understand someone's personal connection to the land and share your stories.

Be direct

Provide direct answers to questions about whether you use glyphosate. Describe what you are working to protect.

Disengage if needed

Some people in some situations just want to fight and are not able to engage respectfully. If that's the case, disengage and try again at a different time. You can provide your contact information.

Key points

When appropriate, convey these key points:

- ◆ "Our goal is to protect habitat for plants and wildlife so we are very careful about what we do. Our applications are on a much smaller scale than those in agriculture or landscaping."
- ◆ "Our applicators are legally certified through the State of California (or overseen by someone who is). They receive training on how to safely apply herbicides and follow all precautionary practices."
- ◆ "We only use products approved by our local agency, which are first approved by the State of California and the US EPA."
- ◆ "The US EPA recently reviewed registration of glyphosate products and found no significant risk to people or wildlife when used appropriately according to the label."

Learn more

Find out what information sources people find useful, and share resources like your organization's website or Cal-IPC's website (www.cal-ipc.org).

RESOURCES

TED Talk: "Why Facts Don't Convince People"

<https://ed.ted.com/featured/hI9YSFHW>

Debunking Handbook on how people change their minds:

https://www.skepticalscience.com/docs/Debunking_Handbook.pdf

US EPA Publication: "Risk Communication in Action: Tools of Message Mapping"

https://cfpub.epa.gov/si/si_public_record_report.cfm?dirEntryId=156207