

## End All National Institutes of Health Grants to the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer

By Angela Logomasini, Ph.D.\*

As the Trump administration considers defunding the World Health Organization (WHO) because of its handling of the COVID-19 crisis, it should also make sure that the National Institutes of Health stop sending grants to the WHO's International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC). These grants waste taxpayer dollars that could be better spent on taxpayer relief or on efforts to meet the many serious public health concerns facing our nation today.

IARC is supposed to be a scientific program that classifies chemicals according to carcinogenic risks, but its process has proven highly flawed and susceptible to political, rather than merely scientific concerns. IARC's faulty conclusions can create serious problems, including bans on useful products, market deselection of such products, and public confusion about cancer risks.

IARC receives funding from member states and has a two-year budget. During 2018-2019 IARC reports a budget of €44.1 million (near \$50 million in 2020 dollars), of which the United States was assessed to pay more than €3.3 million (almost \$3.6 million in 2020 dollars).<sup>1</sup> For 2020-2021, the numbers projected are similar, with the United States again providing €3.3 million, the highest amount assessed for all nations listed on the IARC website, other than Japan, which was assessed the same amount.<sup>2</sup> U.S. funding comes in the form of grants issued by the National Institutes of Environmental Health Sciences, which is part of the U.S. National Institutes of Health.

**IARC Classification Process is Faulty and Largely Meaningless.** IARC focuses on determining if a chemical or activity poses a “hazard,” which is just the first step in risk assessment. A hazard assessment simply considers whether at some exposure level and under some circumstance a substance might pose a risk. The next steps consider dose and exposure, and whether actual human exposures are significant enough to matter. Dr. Timothy Pastoor, CEO of Pastoor Science Communications, pointed out the absurdities of IARC's hazard-focused approach at a congressional hearing in 2018. He explained that the organization's refusal to consider the potency and exposure levels of the agents examined explains why IARC's classification system absurdly places plutonium and salty fish in the same “known carcinogen” category. Other “known carcinogens include serious risks such as “smoking tobacco,” alongside more innocuous things such as wood dust,

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painting houses for a living, and processed meat. Accordingly, IARC's hazard-based classifications are misleading and unhelpful. He rightly concluded that IARC "needs to be significantly reformed or abolished."<sup>3</sup>

**Glyphosate Controversy.** The 2015 classification of the weed killer glyphosate as "probably carcinogenic to humans" offers an egregious example of a classification tainted by political agendas. This classification—in addition to being only a meaningless hazard assessment—is out of line with nearly every other assessment conducted by regulatory bodies and academic researchers around the world.<sup>4</sup>

The active ingredient in the herbicide known as Roundup (also used in other brands), glyphosate was originally produced by Monsanto, a chemical company that has long been a major target of environmental activist groups. Unfortunately, IARC's decision to dub it a probable carcinogen has not been immune to anti-pesticide and anti-Monsanto politics.

IARC enlisted Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) senior contributing scientist Christopher Portier to help as an "advisor" on the glyphosate decision. Given EDF's strident anti-chemical agenda, it should have no influence over what is supposed to be a purely scientific evaluation. An exposé by blogger David Zaruk revealed the fact that Portier also had a serious financial conflict of interest. Within a week of the IARC classification, attorneys that had been developing lawsuits against Monsanto retained Portier as an expert witness. After signing with the law firm, Portier collected more than \$160,000 for his services while trotting the globe lobbying for government bans on glyphosate, all without disclosing who compensated him.<sup>5</sup> Portier has continued to be a key witness for plaintiffs in other glyphosate lawsuits.<sup>6</sup>

**Impacts of IARC's Glyphosate Classification.** Because of the IARC classification, tens of thousands of lawsuits filed against Monsanto now threaten to force the product off the market, as many retailers have decided to stop selling Roundup.<sup>7</sup> In addition, the product has been banned and restricted by governments around the world<sup>8</sup> and may be banned by more in the future.<sup>9</sup>

These bans and market changes also threaten to undermine food production and raise prices. Herbicides benefit farm workers because they replace much of the hard labor associated with manually pulling weeds or mechanical tilling of the soil. Manual and mechanical weed removal raises farming costs, thus increasing food prices. Also, it is often less effective in controlling weeds, thereby reducing yield. Research confirms that elimination of glyphosate will raise costs for farming substantially, impacting food prices.<sup>10</sup>

In addition, herbicide use produces environmental benefits that will be lost if these products are banned. For example, herbicides have made it possible to avoid tilling the soil for weed control. Before the 1960s, farmers relied on tilling, which leads to sediment runoff into nearby waters. Such sediment blocked sunlight out of streams and waterways, killed vegetation, and harmed wildlife.<sup>11</sup>

IARC's misclassification is just one example of how the organization's decisions reflect political perspectives more than science and undermine human health and well-being.<sup>12</sup> Although IARC recently revised its assessment guidelines, the process has not substantially changed. IARC likely will continue to issue similarly troublesome assessments moving forward.<sup>13</sup>

**Conclusion.** The International Agency for Research on Cancer's classification scheme is fatally flawed and incapable of providing meaningful information for policy makers or consumers. Worse, its increasingly political nature indicates that reform is unlikely to solve these problems. It makes no sense for U.S. taxpayers to fund IARC. Pulling funding would be a helpful message to the world that IARC's nonsensical classifications should be disregarded.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> International Agency for Research on Cancer, "Funding," IARC website, accessed February 21, 2018, <https://www.iarc.fr/en/about/igo.php>. "Assessed Contributions from Participating States in 2016–2017," IARC website, accessed August 24, 2018, [https://www.iarc.fr/en/about/funding\\_participatingstates.php](https://www.iarc.fr/en/about/funding_participatingstates.php).

<sup>2</sup> International Agency for Research on Cancer, "Funding," IARC website, accessed on April 29, 2020, <https://www.iarc.fr/about-iarc-funding-assessed-contributions>.

<sup>3</sup> Testimony of Timothy Pastoor, PhD, DABT, ATS, Pastoor Science Communications, LLC, to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Science, Space, and Technology Hearing, "In Defense of Scientific Integrity: Examining the IARC Monograph Programme and Glyphosate Review," February 6, 2018, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/SY/SY00/20180206/106828/HHRG-115-SY00-Wstate-PastoorT-20180206.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, *Draft Human Health and Ecological Risk Assessments for Glyphosate*, <https://www.epa.gov/ingredients-used-pesticide-products/draft-human-health-and-ecological-risk-assessments-glyphosate> and <https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2020-01/documents/glyphosate-interim-reg-review-decision-case-num-0178.pdf>. European Food Safety Authority, "Conclusion on the Peer Review of the Pesticide Risk Assessment of the Active Substance Glyphosate," *EFSA Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 11 (2015), p. 4302, <https://efsa.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.2903/j.efsa.2015.4302>. Health Canada, Re-evaluation Decision RVD2017-01, Glyphosate, Pest Management Regulatory Agency, April 28, 2017, <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/consumer-product-safety/reports-publications/pesticides-pest-management/decisions-updates/registration-decision/2017/glyphosate-rvd-2017-01.html#a1>.

<sup>5</sup> David Zaruk, "Greed, Lies and Glyphosate: The Portier Papers," *The Risk Monger*, October 13, 2017, <https://risk-monger.com/2017/10/13/greed-lies-and-glyphosate-the-portier-papers>.

<sup>6</sup> For example, Portier has been a plaintiff's witness in *Pilliod et al. v. Monsanto Co.*, *Johnson v. Monsanto Co.* and *Hardeman v. Monsanto Co.* For details, see the website of Baum Hedlund Aristei Goldman, Trial Lawyers, with links to Portier testimony on all these cases, website accessed April 30, 2020, <https://www.baumhedlundlaw.com/toxic-tort-law/monsanto-roundup-lawsuit>.

<sup>7</sup> Tom Levitt, "Supermarkets and Garden Centres Ban Roundup Weedkiller Suspected of Causing Cancer," *The Guardian*, August 7, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2015/aug/07/supermarkets-garden-centres-weedkiller-ban-cancer-glyphosate-monsanto>.

<sup>8</sup> Baum Hedlund Aristei Goldman PC, "Where is Glyphosate Banned?" updated July 2018, accessed August 7, 2018, <https://www.baumhedlundlaw.com/toxic-tort-law/monsanto-roundup-lawsuit/where-is-glyphosate-banned>.

<sup>9</sup> Alasdair Sandford, "France 'Committed' to Glyphosate Herbicide Ban despite Parliamentary Rebuff," *Reuters*, May 29, 2018, <http://www.euronews.com/2018/05/29/france-committed-to-glyphosate-herbicide-ban-despite-parliamentary-rebuff>.

<sup>10</sup> Graham Brookes, Farzad Taheripour, and Wallace E. Tyner, "The Contribution of Glyphosate to Agriculture and Potential Impact of Restrictions on Use at the Global Level," *GM Crops & Food*. Vol. 8, No. 4 (December 11, 2017), pp. 216-228, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/21645698.2017.1390637>.

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<sup>11</sup> Allan S. Felsot, *Pesticides and Health: Myths vs. Realities* (New York: American Council on Science and Health, 2011), p. 9, <https://www.acsh.org/news/2011/11/01/pesticides-and-health>.

<sup>12</sup> For more details see Angela Logomasini, "U.S. Should Stop Funding the International Agency for Research on Cancer: Misleading Classifications Promote Counterproductive Bans and Adverse Market Impacts," *On Point* No. 28, Competitive Enterprise Institute, September 19, 2018, <https://cei.org/content/us-should-stop-funding-international-agency-research-cancer>.

<sup>13</sup> Julie E. Goodman, David B. Mayfield, Richard A. Becker, Suzanne B. Hartigan, and Neeraja K. Erraguntla, "Recommendations for further revisions to improve the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) Monograph program," *Regulatory Toxicology and Pharmacology*, Vol. 113 (June 2020) 104639, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0273230020300659>.