

2.15 Deputy K.C. Lewis of the Minister for the Environment regarding the use of chemicals such as glyphosate in public areas: 1(410)

What action, if any, is the Minister taking to dissuade people from using chemicals such as glyphosate in public areas?

The Deputy of St. Martin (The Minister for the Environment):

Glyphosate is the active ingredient of many pesticide products approved for use in the U.K., the E.U. (European Union) and in Jersey. Domestically used products are widely available, while commercial products are purchased from premises licenced and inspected by my department officers. The use of commercial glyphosate products is permitted, if used according to the recommendations on the label, if applied by a suitably qualified person and if no pollution occurs and the water and pesticide codes are followed. This means that pesticides with the correct approval, including glyphosate, can be used in public areas. My department has fully qualified basis advisers that provide free training and advice to industry and to the public. Part of this basis approach is to consider alternative measures, before using pesticides, with pesticides only being used as a last resort. When a pesticide is required, the product with the least harmful profile is always recommended. In the case of use in public areas, the advice is always to consider other control methods first, but if pesticides are required, warning signs should always be used.

2.15.1 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I thank the Minister for his reply. Glyphosate is sold and marketed as a professional strength weed-killer. It is very, very strong stuff. It is banned in several countries, including Malta, Sri Lanka, the Netherlands and Argentina and several European countries are reconsidering the use of glyphosate. The World Health Organisation has listed it as a probable carcinogen for humans. Will the Minister agree to restrict, wherever possible, the use of glyphosate, especially in areas where animals and humans have access? Thank you.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

The initial classification of glyphosate came in March 2015, the International Agency of Research into Cancer and glyphosate is classed as 2A, which is probably carcinogenic to humans. But I would remind Members that category 2A includes red meat, processed meat and acrylamide, which is formed when cooking starchy foods, such as bread. There is no evidence that the use of glyphosate is in anyway harmful to the public, to dogs or, for that matter, any vertebrates. There are a number of other selective herbicides that could have been used in this particular area of ragwort control, but they would have constituted considerably more risk to the public and to animals. Glyphosate products are not prone to leaching and are not likely to pollute surface, or the ground, waters. I think was the best alternative to be used in this instant.

2.15.2 Deputy M. Tadier:

Yes, the Minister compares glyphosate to red meat but, presumably as the Minister for the Environment, he would want to be discouraging people from eating red meat, because of the significant environmental impact it has globally and that there are much more sustainable foods to be eating. But, to move back to the question of glyphosate, is it not the point that we know that glyphosate, like red meat, is a risky substance to have and to use and that if he will not consider banning it, would he consider, at least, some kind of additional taxation on its import at source, so that part of that money can be ring-fenced for the clean-up when it comes to pesticides and ecocide pollution generally.

The Deputy of St. Martin:

I think the idea that the Deputy raises is a dangerous precedent to set, inasmuch as I have just explained to Members that glyphosate is the best alternative for this particular operation. If I was to put a tax on it, where would it stop? I mean, if one taxes, specifically, glyphosate people may then use other alternatives, which I have already explained this morning, would be more dangerous to all sorts of animals and the water table. I have said, again, using chemicals is not my first alternative, there are a number of other ways that one can control these weeds, but there are times when the amount of weed in areas is best controlled in this way. You cannot pull it, there is too much; you cannot flail it, it does not make any difference; and chemicals are the last resort. Occasionally, we do get to this last resort and glyphosate is, as I have explained, the safest option for this type of work.

[11:30]

2.15.3 Deputy M. Tadier:

I was just going to ask the Minister to follow up on that. Does the Minister then not accept the scientific community study right around the world, including leading it to some countries having to ban it or restrict it severely, that finds that it is a carcinogen and that it is a very risky substance, one that is in Jersey sold over the counter? You can buy this from B&Q, for example and people can use it without any training, whatsoever. Is that not a matter of concern to the Minister?

The Deputy of St. Martin:

I would like Members to consider that, if it was such a risky substance as the Deputy suggests, it would not be widely available, not only for commercial, but for domestic use, in the U.K., in the E.U. and in Jersey. Certainly, there will be some countries ... there are always some countries that may take different views of certain chemicals. I am satisfied that, at this time, glyphosate, if used properly, and according to the label recommendations by professional users, using equipment which has been calibrated that it is the safest option if you feel that is the one you want to go down.

2.15.4 Deputy K.C. Lewis:

I thank the Minister for his answer. Glyphosate works by shrinking the root ball of the weed, but it can also have the same effect on humans, apparently, including shrinking of umbilical cords, *et cetera*, in pregnant women, which is why it has to be used with extreme care. I believe Belgium has just banned its use for non-professional use. As has just been said, this chemical can be bought over the counter, which is quite worrying. It has turned up in reservoirs, obviously, very much diluted. But will the Minister agree to step up - it is not compulsory, as yet, to have training to use it in professional areas - but will he step up his campaign for training for people using this chemical, if nothing else?

The Deputy of St. Martin:

There are professional requirements for people using this chemical commercially. Before I get to that, I would just say to the Deputy that while glyphosate can be bought domestically, it is a much diluted form. If you buy it over the counter, without qualifications, it is not the same as the commercial operations. As I said earlier, if you want to buy commercial glyphosate it has to come from an authorised and inspected establishment/retailer. It has to be used by people who have qualifications and can demonstrate that they have and it has to be used in equipment which has been calibrated and certified for its use. So, I think we have plenty of restrictions in place to make sure commercial operators are suitably qualified.