

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

# Consumer Factsheet on: GLYPHOSATE

## [List of Contaminants](#)

As part of the Drinking Water and Health pages, this fact sheet is part of a larger publication:  
**National Primary Drinking Water Regulations**

This is a factsheet about a chemical that may be found in some public or private drinking water supplies. It may cause health problems if found in amounts greater than the health standard set by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

## What is Glyphosate and how is it used?

Glyphosate is an organic solid of odorless white crystals. It is a non-selective herbicide used on many food and non-food crops as well as non-crop areas such as roadsides. When applied at lower rates, it serves as a plant growth regulator. The most common uses include control of broadleaf weeds and grasses in: hay/pasture, soybeans, field corn; ornamentals, lawns, turf, forest plantings, greenhouses, rights-of-way.

The list of trade names given below may help you find out whether you are using this chemical at home or work.

## Trade Names and Synonyms:

Gialka  
Roundup  
Sting  
Rodeo  
Spasor  
Muster  
Tumbleweed  
Sonic  
Glifonox  
Glycel  
Rondo

## Why is Glyphosate being Regulated?

In 1974, Congress passed the Safe Drinking Water Act. This law requires EPA to determine safe levels of chemicals in drinking water which do or may cause health problems. These non-enforceable levels, based solely on possible health risks and exposure, are called Maximum Contaminant Level Goals.

The MCLG for glyphosate has been set at 0.7 parts per million (ppm) because EPA believes this level of protection would not cause any of the potential health problems described below.

Based on this MCLG, EPA has set an enforceable standard called a maximum Contaminant Level (MCL). MCLs are set as close to the MCLGs as possible, considering the ability of public water systems to detect and remove contaminants using suitable treatment technologies.

The MCL has been set at 0.7 ppm because EPA believes, given present technology and resources, this is the lowest level to which water systems can reasonably be required to remove this contaminant should it occur in drinking water.

These drinking water standards and the regulations for ensuring these standards are met, are called National Primary Drinking Water Regulations. All public water supplies must abide by these regulations.

## **What are the Health Effects?**

Short-term: EPA has found glyphosate to potentially cause the following health effects when people are exposed to it at levels above the MCL for relatively short periods of time: congestion of the lungs; increased breathing rate.

Long-term: Glyphosate has the potential to cause the following effects from a lifetime exposure at levels above the MCL: kidney damage, reproductive effects.

## **How much Glyphosate is produced and released to the environment?**

Glyphosate is released to the environment in its use as a herbicide for controlling woody and herbaceous weeds on forestry, right-of-way, cropped and non-cropped sites. These sites may be around water and in wetlands.

It may also be released to the environment during its manufacture, formulation, transport, storage, disposal and cleanup, and from spills. Glyphosate is among the most widely used pesticides by volume. Usage in 1990 was estimated to be 11,595,000 pounds. It ranked eleventh among conventional pesticides in the US during 1990-91. In recent years, 13 to 20 million acres were treated with 18.7 million lbs. annually.

## **What happens to Glyphosate when it is released to the environment?**

Glyphosate is strongly adsorbed to soil, with little potential for leaching to ground water. Microbes in the soil readily and completely degrade it even under low temperature conditions. It tends to adhere to sediments when released to water. Glyphosate does not tend to accumulate in aquatic life.

## **How will Glyphosate be Detected in and Removed from My Drinking Water?**

The regulation for glyphosate became effective in 1994. Between 1993 and 1995, EPA required your water supplier to collect water samples every 3 months for one year and analyze them to find out if glyphosate is present above 6 parts per billion. If it is present above this level, the system must continue to monitor this contaminant.

If contaminant levels are found to be consistently above the MCL, your water supplier must take steps to reduce the amount of glyphosate so that it is consistently below that level. The following treatment methods have been approved by EPA for removing glyphosate: Granular activated charcoal.

## **How will I know if Glyphosate is in my drinking water?**

If the levels of glyphosate exceed the MCL, 0.7 ppm, the system must notify the public via newspapers, radio, TV and other means. Additional actions, such as providing alternative drinking water supplies, may be required to prevent serious risks to public health.

## **Drinking Water Standards:**

Mclg: 0.7 ppm

Mcl: 0.7 ppm

## **Learn more about your drinking water!**

EPA strongly encourages people to learn more about their drinking water, and to support local efforts to protect and upgrade the supply of safe drinking water. Your water bill or telephone book's government listings are a good starting point.

Your local water supplier can give you a list of the chemicals they test for in your water, as well as how your water is treated.

Your state Department of Health/Environment is also a valuable source of information.

For help in locating these agencies or for information on drinking water in general, call: EPA's Safe Drinking Water Hotline: (800) 426-4791.

For additional information on the uses and releases of chemicals in your state, contact the: Community Right-to-Know Hotline: (800) 424-9346