

## Taos County considers pesticide ban

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During the Taos County commission meeting July 5, commissioners discussed the possibility of banning pesticides. These pesticides face similar restrictions around the world and, according to scientific evidence, have the potential to cause cancer in humans.

Ta o s C o u n t y Commissioner Gabe Romero said when he worked at Ace Hardware 15 years ago, the business sold a lot of herbicides and pesticides. Some were so powerful, he said, that they were cordoned off in a special area with extra ventilation.

“People would buy it by the ton and the gallon,” said Romero. Then they’d come back complaining of headaches, children getting hives and pets dying, he said. Those chemicals, said Romero, would “haunt the owner of the store and the employees.”

“The time has come to address this,” Romero said.

The commission conversation centered around glyphosate, the main active ingredient in Monsanto’s Roundup product. It is one of the most widely sold and used broad-spectrum herbicides on the market.

Julie Shedko, owner of Lettuce Grow Farms in El Prado, told the commission the use of broad-spectrum herbicides in Taos is affecting her health and said local governments need to “make sure we’re not poisoning our kids and ourselves ... or killing the environment for our insects.”

There’s scientific evidence to support the advantages of a ban, though it isn’t conclusive. A 2015 report by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), a leg of the World Health Organization, said glyphosate is “probably carcinogenic to humans.” But a competing 2016 report by the United Nation’s Food and Agriculture Organization reported that “glyphosate is unlikely to pose a carcinogenic risk to humans from exposure through the diet.”

However, a Taos County ban would not be without precedence.

Several municipalities in the U.S. have banned glyphosate, most notably Montgomery County, Maryland, with a population that tops 1 million. However, the county’s 2015 ban on “cosmetic” pesticides lacks meaningful regulatory teeth. According to *The Washington Post* , the ban doesn’t apply to agricultural lands or golf courses. The ban does not prohibit the sale of glyphosate herbicides — only the use. Furthermore, enforcement would be driven by complaints rather than aggressive policing of pesticides.

But that’s not the most high-profile glyphosate ban to make waves recently.

The fate of Roundup’s main ingredient was in question in Europe until June 29, when a European Union commission extended the legal use of it for 18 months, at which time the body expects a more conclusive ruling on the chemical’s toxicity, according to *The Wall Street Journal* .

The EU vote wasn't a glowing endorsement — it also came with a recommendation to limit the use of pesticides with glyphosate on public playgrounds and parks.

Shedko said she supports not only banning the use of glyphosate-laden pesticides, but banning the sale of it.

Such a move could likely face an uphill legal challenge. The last time the county commission considered banning a product — “shooters,” or 8-ounce bottles of liquor — in the name of public and environmental health, the conversation quickly quieted down. A Santa Fe ban on shooters faced legal struggles from alcohol retailers.

As such, town of Taos Councilor Fritz Hahn said at the meeting that any ban would need to be cleared by legal counsel and should be a collaborative effort by the town and county. “We want to be careful not to ... open us up to liability,” he said. “We have to go at this in a holistic manner.”

Romero said he'd like to see the conversation continue to the next meeting of the commissioners.

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