

My Turn

Another view on banning pesticides

Sean Walker

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As the county considers the possibility of an herbicide ban, specifically glyphosate, I want to point out some problems that I saw with last week's article ["Taos County considers pesticide ban," July 7-13, 2016].

I encourage you to research actual facts about the product, how it is used and the dangers posed by its application in Taos County. Commissioner Romero's exaggerated view of pesticide toxicity needs to be tempered by examining actual facts before narrowing the scope and targeting a chemical that has no relation to the claims he makes about "pesticides" in general.

Also, the World Health Organization findings that are cited in the article, and the rebuttal made by the United Nation's Food and Agricultural Organization, are inconclusive about whether glyphosate is carcinogenic, and that debate centers around ingestion of the chemical.

While glyphosate is a pesticide in the broad sense, it is an herbicide. It is effective in killing photosynthesizing plants. It is absorbed by the leaves and becomes systemic. It has very little odor. I mention that because Romero's comment about "extra ventilation" in our pesticide area is not for glyphosate, nor any herbicide, but for lawn fertilizer containing ammonia nitrate.

Glyphosate is applied in mist form to the leaves of weeds and typically dries within minutes. It is not a pre-emergent or soil sterilant. Some of our customers find it to be a labor-saving, cost effective way to control existing weeds in driveways, gravel and walkways. It has never been sold by the ton through our business as might have been inferred by Romero's comment. It is regularly purchased premixed (ready to use) or concentrated by the gallon or quart.

All of the studies available online attempting to, or claiming to, link glyphosate to health issues involve the ingestion of the chemical. The reports listed in the article are no different. The root of the studies is the ingestion of crops grown from genetically modified seed developed to be "Roundup ready." That is, resistant to glyphosate. Crops and weeds are sprayed (perhaps with a crop-duster) at the same time, weeds die, crops remain. The soybean or corn is then ingested with glyphosate present. This is the concern of the studies. This is not the application that we sell glyphosate by the gallon for. I'm unaware of any commercial crop producer in Taos County that is using this method.

I'm not an employee or advocate of Monsanto, Scotts or Roundup. I am not suggesting that more people use glyphosate. If Taos County residents decide that a ban of the sale of glyphosate is necessary, we will certainly comply. I think it is important that we consider the proposal with facts in hand, in a local context. If you have questions about any of the products Rio Grande Ace sells, I'm happy to help you find answers to those questions. If I had been

asked before the article was published to respond to the commissioner's claims, I would have confidently said that we are not "haunted" by chemicals, and that we offer alternative methods of weed control.

As you consider how to control weeds, pests, or insects around your home, school or business, please read and follow the instructions on the label. Misuse of some chemicals can be harmful to people and pets.

Walker is the general manager of Rio Grande Ace Hardware.



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