Drinking to your health? Weed killer lurks in many beers and wines

Having a beer or a glass of wine at happy hour or a backyard barbecue shouldn’t include gulping down a potentially hazardous pesticide.

But that’s likely the case, according to a new report by our research and policy partners at U.S. PIRG Education Fund, titled “Glyphosate pesticide in beer and wine.” The study tested 20 different beers, wines and a hard cider. Researchers found the chemical glyphosate, which is the active ingredient in the world’s most popular weed killer, Roundup, in all but one beverage.

Pesticide even found in organics

Roundup even invaded three of the four organic beers and wines tested—despite strict rules prohibiting makers of those products from using glyphosate-based herbicides in production.

The upshot is that, right now in America, even the best-intentioned brewers and vintners struggle to avoid Roundup leaching into their drinks.

How much glyphosate is too much?

This is troubling for numerous reasons. The primary one is that glyphosate poses a health risk. Last year, a California jury concluded that not only was Roundup a “substantial factor” in causing a plaintiff’s terminal cancer, but its producer, Monsanto, also didn’t warn the plaintiff about this risk. A federal jury reached the same conclusion in March, in the first case against Monsanto to be tried in federal court.

The Roundup report doesn’t suggest that the glyphosate that partygoers are drinking reaches established danger levels.
The largest amount of the herbicide discovered in one of the wines was 51.4 parts per billion (ppb) and the beer with the highest total of the pesticide totaled 49.7 ppb. Neither of those numbers meet the Environmental Protection Agency’s risk tolerances for beverages.

That said, at least one previous scientific study found that as little as one part per trillion of glyphosate can stimulate the growth of breast cancer cells and disrupt the endocrine system. What the report raises is that we are finding Roundup in unexpected places.

Glyphosate is showing up everywhere

Glyphosate has infiltrated nearly every type of food tested by the Food and Drug Administration. We know that researchers are finding glyphosate in honey, cereal, ice cream, rainwater and now beverages. What we don’t know is the cumulative effect of all this glyphosate on a person over a lifetime.

Still, even if downing a couple of glasses of Roundup-tainted wine or chomping down on a bowl of glyphosate-infused cereal isn’t definitively dangerous by itself, consumers deserve better transparency.

The public has a right to know what exists in everyday products. Without that knowledge, consumers are prevented from making informed decisions about what they want to eat and drink.

If we’re truly seeking to protect the well-being of people wanting a drink or two, more should be done. Sadly, the government isn’t even conducting basic testing.

**It’s time to ban glyphosate**

Two years ago, the U.S. Department of Agriculture dropped plans to examine glyphosate in food. That would have been a good first step, and it needs to be done. Unless research proves glyphosate’s safety, we need a more direct approach: The pesticide shouldn’t be used in the United States.

Until then, it will be hard to offer a full-throated “bottoms up” to your buddies, while you’re worrying about what’s actually at the bottom of the bottle.

By Kara Cook-Schultz, director
Campaign to Ban Roundup

*Originally posted at https://medium.com/u-s-pirg*

**NEWS BRIEFS**

**PIRG CONSUMER WATCHDOG**

How safe is our food? Not safe enough, says PIRG Consumer Watchdog team, and it’s trending in the wrong direction

Unsafe food recalls in the U.S. are trending the wrong way. From 2013 to 2018, they rose 10 percent overall, and 83 percent for the most hazardous meat and poultry recalls.

These were the chief findings in “How Safe Is Our Food?”, a report released by our partners at U.S. PIRG Education Fund, the research and policy arm of our national network. The report reached millions of people through coverage on CBS This Morning, NBC News and USA Today.

“We need to be looking for farm-to-fork preventative solutions that are logical,” PIRG Consumer Watchdog Adam Garber told USA Today. “By doing that, we can protect people’s health.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 1 in 6 people in the U.S. contract foodborne illnesses each year. To stem the problem, our Consumer Watchdog team is calling
for public health standards for contamination in agricultural water, a ban on salmonella in meat, and a better recall system to get dangerous food out of people’s homes.

ZERO OUT TOXICS

**Menards joins other home improvement stores in ditching deadly paint strippers**

Dozens have died from the chemical fumes of toxic paint strippers sold in stores across America, but now Menards is joining other home improvement retailers in attempting to stop that number from growing.

The Midwestern home improvement store’s Feb. 13 announcement that it would stop the sale of toxic paint strippers came just one day after our national network and coalition partners delivered a letter requesting swift and public action.

“The chemicals in these products are a hazard to public health, and stores need to protect consumers by providing safer alternatives,” said Kara Cook-Schultz, director of our national toxics campaign. “We applaud Menards for doing the right thing and taking action on this important issue.”

Our network partners were part of the broad coalition calling on Menards to phase out these deadly products. Menards has now joined Lowe’s, Walmart and other major retailers in its pledge to protect consumers and get toxic paint strippers off store shelves.

21ST CENTURY TRANSPORTATION

**Transit, biking and walking options could keep millennials in Wisconsin**

If we want Wisconsin’s young adults to stay here—and improve the quality of life for everyone in our state—we should offer better transportation options.

A survey of more than 600 college students on 24 Wisconsin campuses, released by WISPIRG Foundation on Feb. 12, found that 75 percent of students said it was important to them to live in a place where they can get around without a car.

“Car culture no longer represents the ‘American Dream’ for many young people,” said Emma Fisher, WISPIRG Foundation organizer and lead author of the report. “By rethinking our transportation spending priorities, we could make Wisconsin more attractive to the young people that our communities need to thrive.”

Rather than wasting money on highway expansions, Wisconsin should invest in transit, walking and biking infrastructure. Communities that offer a variety of ways to get around—like Madison, Eau Claire and La Crosse—are successfully attracting young people while making life there better for everyone, the report finds.
U.S. PIRG member Rachel and her family are working to eliminate plastic from their lives.

**TOP STORY:**
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**THANKS TO YOU**

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**ZERO WASTE**

**Here’s how one PIRG member cut her plastic waste in half**

As a working mom with three young kids and her own business to run, Rachel, a member of U.S. PIRG, is no doubt busy. But through small changes over time, she’s been able to dramatically reduce the plastic waste her family produces.

“I was completely surprised by how easy it is to cut down on trash. Once I swapped a single-use item out for a reusable alternative, I never had to think about buying that thing again,” Rachel told us.

“The biggest benefit is that my mentality has shifted,” she said. “While recycling is better than a landfill, reducing my consumption and eliminating single-use items is simply easier and better for the environment. I’ve become really motivated to consume less, and it’s freeing to not be constantly wanting more stuff.”

WISPIRG’s Beyond Plastic campaign is making it easier for people like Rachel to reduce waste by calling for bans on single-use items like polystyrene cups and containers.

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**Dear WISPIRG member,**

We all want a healthier, safer and more secure future. In recent months, WISPIRG took steps to make that future a reality — and we couldn’t have done it without your support. I hope you enjoy reading more about the work you made possible.

Thank you,

Peter Skopec, State Director
info@wispirg.org

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