



Credit: Warming up a little/flickr

Stéphane Horel, Stéphane Foucart 15m

[Originals](#) →

## The Monsanto Papers, Part 1 — Operation: Intoxication

In order to save glyphosate, the Monsanto corporation has undertaken an effort to destroy the United Nations' cancer agency by any means possible. Here is the part one of an investigation from Le Monde.

*Editors Note: This month Le Monde won the [Prix Varenne](#) Presse quotidienne nationale (Varenne Award for the national daily press) for their [Monsanto Papers series](#), an investigation on the worldwide war the Monsanto corporation has started in order to save glyphosate, originally published in June.*

*Below is part one, [originally published June 1, 2017](#), translated by [GM Watch](#) and the [Health and Environment Alliance](#).*

"We have been attacked in the past, we have faced smear campaigns, but this time we are the target of an orchestrated campaign of an unseen scale and duration." Christopher Wild's smile quickly faded. Through the window of the high rise where the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) is headquartered, the rooftops of Lyon, France, spread out behind his tall figure.

Christopher Wild is the director of the agency so he weighed every word—speaking with a seriousness appropriate for the situation. For the past two years, a blazing onslaught has targeted the institution he is running: the credibility and integrity of IARC's work are being challenged, its experts are being denigrated and harassed by lawyers, and its finances weakened.

For nearly half a century IARC has been charged, under the auspices of the World Health Organization (WHO), to draw up an inventory of carcinogens. But now the venerable agency is beginning to waver under the assault.

The hostilities were launched on a specific date: March 20, 2015. On that day, IARC announced the conclusions of its "[Monograph 112](#)". The findings left the whole world stunned. Unlike the majority of regulatory agencies, IARC declared the most widely used pesticide on the planet to be genotoxic (it causes DNA damage), carcinogenic to animals, and a "probable carcinogen" for humans.

The pesticide is glyphosate, the main component of Roundup, the flagship product of one of the world's most well-known companies: Monsanto. Glyphosate is also the Leviathan of the agrochemical industry. Used for more than 40 years, it is present in no less than 750 products marketed by about 100 companies in more than 130 countries.

### Glyphosate, the bedrock of Monsanto

Between 1974, when it was placed on the market, and 2014, the use of glyphosate increased from 3,200 tons to 825,000 tons per year. A dramatic increase that is due to the massive adoption of seeds that are genetically modified to tolerate it – "Roundup Ready" seeds.

Of all the agrochemical companies that could be affected by measures to restrict or ban the product, there is one whose very survival is at stake. Monsanto, which developed glyphosate, has made the chemical the bedrock of its economic model. The company has built its fortune selling Roundup and the seeds that go with it.

So when IARC announced that glyphosate was "probably carcinogenic," the American firm reacted with unprecedented brutality. In a company [statement](#), it vilified IARC's work as "junk science"—a selective "cherry-picking" of data, based on an "agenda-driven bias," all leading to a decision made after only "hours of discussion at a one-

### FROM OUR NEWSROOM

#### Nov. 19 Weekend Reader: Bonn, Fukushima, Trump and more Trump

Today: Interior Secretary under scrutiny; New Zealand's brilliant idea-- or not; a dissenting view on Thanksgiving.

#### Closing the climate talks, two 'rays of light'

What happens when a major world emitter steps away from the table?

#### Treatment, taste and trends

Giving hogs a diverse diet and some space seems better for their health—and ours

#### Nov. 18: Rural unrest in Big Pig country; Bonn voyage to climate ambition

#### Bringing the "farm" back to hog farming

A look at the economics and scalability of raising hogs outside—and the characters doing it

#### Hog waste-to-gas: Renewable energy or more hot air?

Biogas could clean up manure and mitigate methane; but economics and inconsistent regulations remain hurdles

Don't get left in the rain!  
Join our Above The Fold  
newsletter!

Enter email:

Subscribe!



week meeting."

Never before had a corporation so crudely challenged the integrity of an agency under the aegis of the United Nations. The battle was launched—the one taking place in the open at least.

## A year's work to evaluate the pesticide

Because in its own offices Monsanto was dancing to a completely different tune. The company knew full well that IARC's evaluation of glyphosate was carried out after a year of work by a group of experts, who then met for several days in Lyon to deliberate. IARC procedures require that the industries affected by the product under review have the right to attend this final meeting.

For the evaluation of glyphosate, Monsanto had sent an "observer," the epidemiologist Tom Sorahan, a professor at the University of Birmingham (UK), whom the company sometimes employs as a consultant. The report he sent to his bosses on March 14, 2015, assured them that everything was done according to the rules.

"I found the Chair, sub-chairs and invited experts to be very friendly and prepared to respond to all comments I made," wrote Mr Sorahan in an email sent to a Monsanto executive. The email appears in the "Monsanto Papers" —a collection of the company's internal documents that a U.S. court started to make public in early 2017 as part of ongoing lawsuits.

"The meeting followed the IARC guidelines," the observer added. "Dr Kurt Straif, Head of the IARC Monographs Programme, has an intimate knowledge of the IARC rules and insists these are followed."

## Counter-attack



International Agency for Research on Cancer in Lyon, France. (Credit: Olivier Engel)

The academic scientist, who has not responded to requests from *Le Monde*, seemed to be very embarrassed by the idea that his name might be associated with Monsanto's response to the IARC decision: "I do not wish to be referenced in any document from your PA/PR people," he wrote, though at the same time proposing that he would be "happy to assist in formulating statements that you may wish to make" in the inevitable counter-attack that the company was putting in place.

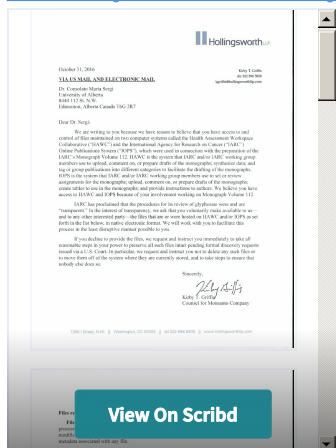
A few months later, the non-American scientists who had been members of the IARC panel on glyphosate all received the [same letter](#). Sent by Monsanto's law firm, Hollingsworth, the letter told them to hand over all the files related to their work on "Monograph 112."

Drafts, comments, data tables ... everything that had gone through the IARC computer system. "If you decline to provide the files," the lawyers warned, "we request and instruct you to immediately take all reasonable steps in your power to preserve all such files intact pending formal discovery requests issued via a US Court."

"I found your letter intimidating and noxious," said one of the [scientists in his reply dated November 4, 2016](#). "I find your approach reprehensive and lacking in common courtesy even by today's standards."

Pathologist Consolato Maria Sergi, a professor at the University of Alberta in Canada continued: "I consider your letter pernicious because it maliciously seeks to instill some anxiety and apprehension in an independent group of experts."

[Lettre de Hollingsworth à Consolato Maria Sergi](#) by [LeMonde.fr](#) on Scribd



## Intimidating maneuvers

U.S. members of the IARC working group are being subjected to even more "intimidating" measures. In the U.S., the Freedom of Information Act, or FOIA, allows every citizen—under certain conditions—to request access to documents produced by public bodies and their officials: memos, emails, internal reports, etc.

According to our information, since November 2015 the law firms Hollingsworth and Sidley Austin have filed five applications to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) alone where two of the group experts are employed.

Applications on other scientists have also been made to the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA), Texas A&M University and Mississippi State University.

Some of these institutions have even been subpoenaed by Monsanto lawyers as part of ongoing glyphosate litigations – and therefore obliged to hand over some of their internal documents.

Is the aim of these intimidating maneuvers to silence criticism? World-renowned scientists who are usually open to media requests did not respond to *Le Monde's* requests—even for interviews off the record. Some did agree to speak but only from a private line outside office hours.

Members of the U.S. Congress do not need to use FOIA to be able to hold federal scientific institutions accountable. Republican Jason Chaffetz, former member of the House of Representatives and former chair of the House Oversight & Government Reform Committee, [wrote](#) to Francis Collins, the director of NIH, on September 26, 2016.

IARC's decisions have "generated much controversy and alarm," he wrote. And despite its "record of controversy, retractions, and inconsistencies," IARC receives "substantial taxpayer funding" from the NIH.

In fact, 1.2 million euros out of IARC's 40 million euros annual budget comes from a NIH grant. For this reason Jason Chaffetz asked the NIH director for details and justifications of all NIH expenditure related to IARC.

## Characters that are almost out of a John Le Carré novel



Republican Jason Chaffetz, former member of the House of Representatives and former chair of the House Oversight & Government Reform Committee. (Credit: Brookings Institution)

The same day, the Chaffetz letter was [applauded](#) by the American Chemistry Council (ACC). As the U.S. chemical industry's powerful lobbying organization, of which Monsanto is a member, they "hope that it will shed light on the close and somewhat opaque relationship" between the IARC and American scientific institutions.

The chemical lobby had found a valuable ally in Mr. Chaffetz. In March, the former congressman wrote to the head of another federal research organization – the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) – to ask her to account for the research that the institution has funded on the harmful effects of bisphenol A, a compound widely used in some plastics.

What better way to neutralize an institution than to cut off its funding? In the months following the publication of "Monograph 112," CropLife International, the organization that defends the interests of pesticide and seed companies around the world, approached some representatives of the 25 member states of IARC's governing council to complain about the quality of the agency's work.

Known as "Participating States," they contribute about 70 percent of IARC's total budget. According to IARC, at least three of them—Canada, the Netherlands and Australia—were approached. None of them replied to *Le Monde's* requests.

Throughout 2016, characters who seemed to be almost out of a John Le Carré novel made their appearances in the glyphosate saga. In June, someone who presented himself as a journalist but did not announce or register himself as such attended the conference organized by IARC in Lyon for its fiftieth anniversary.

## The strange Mr. Watts

Prowling among scientists and international civil servants, the man was seeking details about the functioning of IARC, its funding, its monograph program, and so on.

A few months later, at the end of October 2016, the man reappeared—this time at the

annual conference of the [Ramazzini Institute](#), a renowned and respected cancer research organization based near Bologna, Italy. Why on Earth the Ramazzini? Perhaps because the Italian institute had announced a few months earlier that it was going to conduct its own carcinogenicity study on glyphosate.

Related: [Of mice, Monsanto and a mysterious tumor](#)

Christopher Watts – that's the man's name – asked questions about the independence of the institute and its funding sources. Because he used an e-mail address that ended "@economist.com," those he approached did not question his affiliation to the prestigious British weekly, *The Economist*. To the scientists who did ask for details, he said he worked for the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), a consultancy which is a subsidiary of the British press group.

The EIU confirmed that Mr. Watts had indeed produced several reports for them but was "unable to confirm in what capacity he attended" the two conferences. "During that time, he was working on a story for *The Economist*, which ultimately was not published." Oddly enough, the weekly's newsroom replied "there's no one of that name on our staff."

The only thing that seems clear is the name of a company that Mr. Watts created at the end of 2014: Corporate Intelligence Advisory Company. According to the administrative documents, the personal address of Mr. Watts is located in Albania. He did not wish to answer questions from *Le Monde*.

### Intrusive and bureaucratic guerrilla warfare

Within the space of a few months, at least five individuals presented themselves as a journalist, independent researcher or assistant in law firms to approach IARC scientists and researchers involved in IARC's work. All were seeking very specific information about the agency's procedures and funding.

One of them, Miguel Santos-Neves, works for a New York-based economic intelligence company called Ergo. According to a [report in the New York Times](#) in July 2016, he was collared during a U.S. judicial investigation for misrepresenting his identity.

On behalf of Uber, Mr. Santos-Neves had investigated a plaintiff who had filed a class-action suit against the company and questioned his professional entourage under false pretenses. Ergo did not respond to *Le Monde's* enquiries.

Just like Christopher Watts, two sister organizations with nefarious reputations are interested not only in IARC but also in the Ramazzini Institute. The Energy and Environmental Legal Institute (E&E Legal) introduces itself as a non-profit organization, the missions of which include to "hold accountable those who seek excessive and destructive government regulation that's based on agenda-driven policy making, junk science, and hysteria."

The Free Market Environmental Law Clinic, for its part, says "it seeks to provide a counter-weight to the litigious environmental movement that fosters an economically destructive regulatory regime in the United States."

According to *Le Monde*, they have initiated no fewer than 17 FOIA requests to the NIH and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Engaged in legal, bureaucratic and intrusive guerrilla warfare, they have demanded the correspondence of several American officials "containing the terms 'IARC', 'glyphosate', 'Guyton'" (Kathryn Guyton is the IARC scientist responsible for the "Monograph 112").

They seek the smallest of details on scholarships, grants and other financial and non-financial relationships between these American agencies, IARC, some scientists, and the Ramazzini Institute.

### "Let nothing go"



(Credit: Mike Mozart/flickr)

The two organizations are headed by David Schnare, a [confirmed climate sceptic](#) who is known for harassing climate scientists. In November 2016, Mr. Schnare temporarily left E&E Legal to join Donald Trump's transition team.

As for Steve Milloy, who is also among the leaders of the organization, he is a well-known figure in the small world of tobacco industry-funded propaganda. When asked about their motivations and sources of funding, the president of E&E Legal replied by



email: "Hi, we're not interested in participating."

The attention on these FOIA requests is amplified by op-eds published in some media outlets.

One of them, *The Hill*, is mandatory reading for every political player in Washington DC. Their authors are a squadron of propagandists that the association US Right to Know (USRTK) has documented as having longstanding ties to agrochemical companies and conservative think tanks, such as the Heartland Institute or the George C. Marshall Institute, both known for their major role in the manufacture of climate skepticism.

Their writings expose exactly the same arguments. And sometimes even the same phrases: the "shoddy science" of an IARC ravaged by conflicts of interest and "widely criticized"—yet without ever saying by whom.

The lawyers involved in U.S. lawsuits revealed that Monsanto also used more discreet means. Responding under oath to questions from lawyers representing people who attribute their cancer to Roundup, the firm's executives revealed a confidential program aimed at countering all criticisms and called "Let Nothing Go."

The transcripts of these hearings remain confidential. But memos from the law firms involved allow a little more to be known. They show that Monsanto uses third-party companies that "employ individuals who appear to have no connection to the industry but who in turn post positive comments on news articles and Facebook posts, defending Monsanto, its chemicals, and GMOs."

## The machine seems to be racing ahead with the advent of Mr. Trump

In recent months, the coalition against IARC has grown. At the end of January 2017, a few days after the inauguration of Donald Trump at the White House, the American Chemistry Council joined its ranks.

The U.S. chemical lobby has opened a new front on social networks in the form of a "Campaign for Accuracy in Public Health Research," with a dedicated [website](#) and a [Twitter account](#).

Its stated purpose is to obtain a "reform" of the IARC monograph program. The powerful lobbying organization has put aside the kid gloves: "A side of bacon or a side of plutonium? It's all the same according to IARC."

The tweet goes with a photomontage showing two fluorescent green bars dipping into bacon and eggs on a plate.

In October 2015, IARC indeed classified processed meats as "carcinogenic" and red meat as a "probable carcinogen" like glyphosate.

Perhaps having privileged access to President Trump's closest circle provides a feeling of omnipotence to these chemical and agrochemical industries? The chief American lobbyist of the American Chemistry Council, Nancy Beck, taken over as Deputy Assistant Administrator at the Office of Chemical Safety and Pollution Prevention of the U.S. EPA, the very agency that oversees the re-examination of the glyphosate file.

And was not Andrew Liveris, the boss of Dow Chemical, a member of the American Chemistry Council, entrusted by Donald Trump in person to lead the president's "Manufacturing Jobs Initiative"?

The machine seems to be racing ahead with the advent of the Trump era.

At the end of March, the Republican Texan Lamar Smith, chair of the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology, [addressed](#) the now former Secretary of Health and Human Services, Tom Price. Smith focused his demands on the financial links between the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) and the Ramazzini Institute in order, he wrote, to "ensure that grant recipients adhere to the highest standards of scientific integrity".

## Ignorance and lies

That is all it took for this congressman's request to become, in the writings of two propagandists called Julie Kelly and Jeff Stier, a "Congress's investigation" into the "obscure organisation" that is the Ramazzini Institute.

Published shortly afterwards in the *National Review*, their article attacked personally both the director of NIEHS Linda Birnbaum, accused of promoting a "chemophobic agenda," and her former Associate Director, Christopher Portier, who accompanied IARC's work as an "invited specialist," described as a "well-known anti-glyphosate activist." Both were described as "Ramazzini fellows".

According to Kelly and Stier, this is another example of "how science has been politicized." The story was also taken up by others, including Breitbart News, the far-right website co-founded by Steve Bannon, the former White House Chief Strategist.

To describe the Institute or Collegium Ramazzini (the two are confused in the articles) as an "obscure organization" here, or as a "kind of Rotary Club for activist scientists" elsewhere, is at best ignorance and at worst a lie. Founded in 1982 by Irving Selikoff and Cesare Maltoni, two leading figures in public health, the [Collegium Ramazzini](#) is an academy of 180 scientists specializing in environmental and occupational health.

Linda Birnbaum and Christopher Portier are "Fellows" of the Collegium. And so are the Head of the IARC Monographs Program Kurt Straif, and four other experts from the Monograph 112 working group, all top-flight scientists in their respective fields.

## "We are not afraid"

The launch of a long-term toxicology study on glyphosate by the Ramazzini Institute in May 2016 has made a target of an organization renowned for its expertise in cancer. The Head of the Research Department of the institute, Fiorella Belpoggi, is one of the few scientists who agreed to speak to *Le Monde*: "We are few, we have no money, we are just good scientists and we are not afraid."

The attacks on the Ramazzini and the IARC are very unlikely to stop. After glyphosate, other strategic chemicals are on IARC's list of "priorities" for the period 2014–2019. These include more pesticides and also bisphenol A (BPA) and aspartame.

The NIEHS happens to be one of the world's leading funders of research on the toxicity of BPA. As for aspartame, the study that alerted the world to the carcinogenic properties of this sweetener was carried out several years ago... by the Ramazzini Institute.

"I hadn't realized we were so important before this," whispered Fiorella Belpoggi, "but if you get rid of IARC, NIEHS and the Ramazzini Institute, you get rid of three symbols of independence in science."

A type of science that has become a threat to economic interests worth hundreds of billions of euros.

Tomorrow: Part 2 — *Reaping a bitter harvest*

## RELATED ARTICLES AROUND THE WEB

[California says key ingredient in Roundup weed killer can cause ... ›](#)

[Does the World's Top Weed Killer Cause Cancer? Trump's EPA Will ... ›](#)



15m

[Originals →](#)

# Analysis: The metabolic legacy of environmental injustice

We need to address the disproportionate exposures of African Americans and Latinos to diabetes-promoting chemicals

The impacts of racism and segregation continue to reverberate in the health of communities of color—and one of the starkest disparities is in diabetes rates.

Keep reading...





Credit: CAFNR/flickr

Stéphane Horel, Stéphane Foucart 47m

[Originals](#) →

## The Monsanto Papers, Part 2 — Reaping a bitter harvest

In order to save glyphosate, the Monsanto corporation has undertaken an effort to destroy the United Nations' cancer agency by any means possible. Here is part two of an investigation from Le Monde.

*Editors Note: This month Le Monde won the [Prix Varenne](#) Presse quotidienne nationale (Varenne award for the national daily press) for their Monsanto Papers series, an investigation on the worldwide war the Monsanto corporation has started in order to save glyphosate, originally published in June.*

*Below is part two, [originally published June 2, 2017](#), translated by the [Health and Environment Alliance](#).*

They had promised it was "safer than table salt" – but that was in the advertisements.

It is the most widely used herbicide in the world. It is the main ingredient in their flagship product, Roundup, the bedrock on which their firm has built its economic model, its wealth and its reputation. A product which has been on the market for more than 40 years and became a best-seller with the development of genetically-modified seeds called "Roundup Ready."

It is this product, glyphosate, that could in fact be carcinogenic.

On March 20, 2015, Monsanto took a major hit. On that day, the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) declared glyphosate to be genotoxic (it causes DNA damage), carcinogenic for animals, and a "probable carcinogen" for humans.

The jury was a group of 17 seasoned experts representing 11 different nationalities who were brought together by this official UN agency, which is responsible for establishing an inventory of carcinogenic substances and whose scientific opinions on the matter have been authoritative for half a century.

There was therefore no doubt that this would also be the destiny of their conclusions on glyphosate, published in the form of a report called "Monograph 112."

### A declaration of war

Safe from prying eyes, the fury of the U.S. corporation crossed the Atlantic via optical fibre. On the very same day, a message that carried the whiff of a declaration of war was sent to Geneva (Switzerland) to the director of the World Health Organization (WHO), which is IARC's parent organization.

The letterhead sported the famous little green branch framed by an orange rectangle: the Monsanto logo. "It is our understanding that IARC participants purposefully chose to disregard dozens of studies and publicly available regulatory assessments that support the conclusion that glyphosate does not pose a human health risk," wrote an accusatory Philip Miller, Monsanto's Vice President of Global Regulatory and Governmental Affairs.

Among the points that he wanted to be discussed in an "urgent meeting" were what "steps can be immediately taken to rectify this highly questionable review and conclusion," the selection criteria for the experts, and even "an accounting of all funding for the classification of glyphosate by IARC, including donors."

Don't get left in the rain!  
Join our Above The Fold  
newsletter!

Enter email:

Subscribe!



### Nov. 19 Weekend Reader: Bonn, Fukushima, Trump and more Trump

Today: Interior Secretary under scrutiny; New Zealand's brilliant idea-- or not; a dissenting view on Thanksgiving.

### Closing the climate talks, two 'rays of light'

What happens when a major world emitter steps away from the table?

### Treatment, taste and trends

Giving hogs a diverse diet and some space seems better for their health—and ours

### Nov. 18: Rural unrest in Big Pig country; Bonn voyage to climate ambition

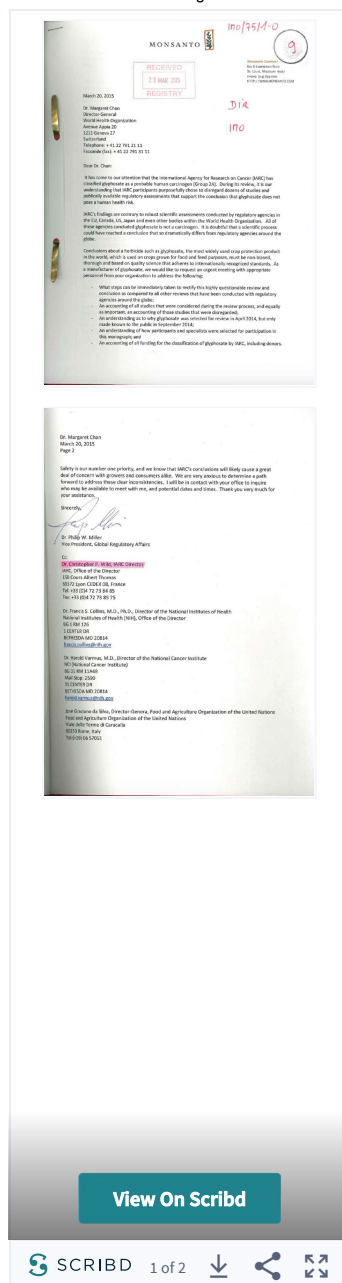
### Bringing the "farm" back to hog farming

A look at the economics and scalability of raising hogs outside—and the characters doing it

The roles had switched: it was now the international organization that had to be accountable to the company.

Throughout the summer of 2015, CropLife International—the lobby organization of the agrochemical sector in which Monsanto is a member—took over the [intimidation by letter](#). Intrusive demands jostled with veiled threats.

Monsanto letter to Dr. Margaret Chan:



## IARC, a stronghold of independence and integrity

IARC has seen it all before. Not for the first time is it the target of criticisms and attacks—those are commensurate with the agency's reputation. Although IARC's evaluations do not have any regulatory value, they can sometimes threaten huge commercial interests.

[The most documented attack](#) concerns passive smoking, which was evaluated by IARC at the end of the 1990s. But even in the heyday of confrontations with Big Tobacco, the weapons used were relatively tame. "I have been working for IARC for 15 years and I have never seen anything like what has been happening in the past two years," confided Kurt Straif, Head of the agency's Monographs Program.

It would be difficult to make IARC look like a controversial agency, contested within the scientific community itself and driven by an "anti-industry" bias. For [the overwhelming majority](#) of scientists in the academic world—cancer specialists or public health researchers—the agency represents a stronghold of independence and integrity.

"I honestly have trouble imagining a more rigorous and objective way to proceed towards collective scientific reviews," said epidemiologist Marcel Goldberg, a researcher at the French National Institute for Health and Medical research (INSERM), which has participated in the work of several monographs.

For each of them, IARC brings together around 20 researchers from different countries, selected not only for their experience and scientific competence but for the absence of any conflicts of interest.



Moreover, IARC bases its opinions on studies published in scientific journals and excludes confidential industry-sponsored studies. This is not the case for most regulatory agencies, which—on the contrary—may give decisive weight to studies performed and supplied by the companies whose products are being assessed.

Among them is the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), the official EU agency in charge of assessing risks related to pesticides.

In fall 2015, the European Union was to decide whether or not it would renew its authorization for glyphosate for at least another decade. As the basis for that decision, EFSA's opinion on glyphosate was much-awaited. By November, Monsanto could take a breath. [EFSA's conclusions](#) contradicted IARC: EFSA concluded that glyphosate was neither genotoxic nor carcinogenic.

Shortly afterwards, Monsanto's breath was taken away again.

### Attack against a scientist



Christopher Portier

A few weeks later, around a hundred scientists [severely criticized](#) EFSA's conclusions in a respected journal, considering them flawed by numerous shortcomings. Behind the initiative was a U.S. scientist who had helped the scientists working on IARC's monograph as an "invited specialist."

It was on him that the attacks concentrated.

In environmental health circles, Christopher Portier is certainly not a nobody. "I have read here and there that Chris Portier has no competence and it's probably one of the most ridiculous things I have ever heard," said Dana Loomis, the Vice Director of the IARC monographs. "He developed many of the analytic tools that are used everywhere to interpret toxicological studies!" Mr Portier is one of those scientists whose CV does not fit in less than 30 pages.

Author of more than 200 scientific publications, he has been Director of the National Center for Environmental Health at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), director of the U.S. Agency on Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, associate director of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) and of the National Toxicology Program. "That's undoubtedly a unique career," said Robert Barouki, director of a toxicology research unit at INSERM.

Newly retired, Christopher Portier now offers his competence as an expert and adviser to several international organizations, including the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), a U.S. environmental protection NGO.

And it is this man who was to become the target of an attack ...

On April 18, 2016, the news agency Reuters published a [long article on IARC](#) in which the agency was described as a "semi-autonomous" WHO agency guilty of "confus[ing] consumers."

The article referred to "concerns about potential conflicts of interest at IARC: It involves an adviser to the agency who is closely linked to the Environmental Defense Fund, a U.S. campaign group opposed to pesticides".

### Rants and recriminations

"Critics," wrote Reuters, "argue that IARC shouldn't have allowed him to be involved in the assessment of glyphosate."

Remarkable detail: the news agency—which declined to respond to *Le Monde*—meanwhile quoted three scientists who castigate the institution, without ever mentioning that all three are widely known to be industry consultants.

But who are these nameless "critics"? In reality, the criticism of IARC can be traced back to the blog of David Zaruk, a former lobbyist for the chemical industry, who has worked at some point for the public relations firm Burson-Marsteller.

In Brussels, where he is based, Zaruk is infamous for his penchant for insults (the authors of this article have been his targets several times). He was the first to protest

against Portier's conflicts of interest, which he considers undermine IARC's opinion. And he has persistently flayed the American scientist in the course of no less than twenty long posts around the topic of glyphosate – not to mention his tweets.

**Related:** [The Monsanto Papers, Part 1—Operation: Intoxication](#)

Professor Portier is described successively as an "activist", a "rat", a "demon", a "weed", a "mercenary", and even a "little shit", who "wormed his way" into the fruit that is IARC. To him, the agency is like a "scab", and "the more" he "pick[s] at it", "the more pus [he sees] coming out" because IARC is "infected by its hubris," and "infected by politicised activist science" and "infected by anti-industry bias."

Zaruk says he has had "three contacts" with Monsanto but denies he has been remunerated for his writing. "I did not receive a penny for my blogs on glyphosate," he stated in an email to *Le Monde*. In April 2017, he published again a diatribe against NGOs, Christopher Portier and several journalists, which he illustrated with a photograph of Nazis burning books on the Opernplatz in Berlin in 1933.

Zaruk's ramblings could have been easily checked and invalidated. But the prestigious guarantee of a Reuters' article gave the go-ahead to their wide dissemination.

Within a few weeks, the accusations of conflicts of interest were transmitted and quoted in *The Times* of London, the daily *The Australian*, and in the U.S. in *National Review* and *The Hill* under the signature of Bruce Chassy, an emeritus professor of the University of Illinois funded by Monsanto—as confidential documents [obtained by the association](#) US Right to Know (USRTK) in September 2015 have shown.

## Conflicts of interests

Zaruk's "work" was also cited in *Forbes* magazine in an op-ed signed by a biologist affiliated with the Hoover Institution, a think tank close to the Republican party. His name appears in declassified archives of the tobacco industry. At that time, this man would offer to write columns or land media appearances to "communicat[e on] risks and science". Rates between \$5,000 and \$15,000.

The attacks of the Brussels blogger were also echoed by well-known propaganda websites, such as the American Council on Science and Health and the Genetic Literacy Project. Fed by PR people linked to the pesticides and biotechnology industries, the latter published an article about Christopher Portier and IARC signed by Andrew Porterfield, who [describes himself](#) quite simply as a "communications consultant for the biotechnology industry."

And what about the suggestion that Portier faces conflicts of interest? Did the Environmental Defense Fund—through him—weigh in in favor of IARC's decision to classify glyphosate as a "probable carcinogen"?

"Because he had a link to this organization, Portier had the status of 'invited specialist'," explains Kathryn Guyton, IARC's scientist in charge of Monograph 112. This means that he was consulted by the working group but didn't contribute to the decision to classify the chemical in one category or the other. Real conflicts of interest however exist—but elsewhere.

In May 2016, while the press and the blogosphere were all out in relaying suspicions of malpractice at IARC, it was the turn of another group of UN experts to release their opinion. The Joint Meeting on Pesticides Residues (JMPR), a joint WHO and UN Food and Agriculture (FAO) organization group that rules on risks related to food (and not to exposure via inhalation, skin contact, etc) cleared glyphosate.

Almost one year earlier, a coalition of NGOs had warned WHO about conflicts of interest in the JMPR. Three of its members collaborate with the International Life Science Institute (ILSI), a scientific lobby organization financed by major agribusiness, biotechnologies and chemical industries—from Mars to Bayer and from Kellogg to Monsanto.

## Serious allegations

Toxicologist Alan Boobis (Imperial College, United Kingdom) was serving as co-president of JMPR but also [chair of ILSI's board of trustees](#). Angelo Moretto (University of Milano, Italy) was rapporteur in the JMPR while acting as an industry consultant and [member of the board of trustees of a structure created by ILSI](#). Vicky Dellarco, also a member of JMPR, was an industry consultant and a member of various ILSI working groups.

JMPR experts are supposedly subjected to the same independence rules—among the strictest in the world—as those applied at IARC, namely the WHO rules. Because it can alter the credibility of the institution and its decisions, an apparent conflict of interest is as serious as an actual conflict of interest.

However, questioned by *Le Monde*, the WHO confirms that "no expert was deemed to have had a conflict of interest preventing their participation in the JMPR."

This answer left Hilal Elver and Baskut Tuncak dissatisfied; they are respectively the [Special UN Rapporteur on right to food](#) and the [Special UN Rapporteur on hazardous](#)

"We respectfully call upon WHO to explain how exactly it came to the conclusion that the experts' ties to industry did not present an apparent or potential conflict of interest under its own rules" is how these two experts reacted when questioned by *Le Monde*.

"Strong, clear and transparent processes for conflicts of interest are essential for the integrity of the system" they said before "encouraging" the organizations of the United Nations to "review" them.

These two experts wrote in their [report on the right to food](#) that some "serious claims" exist "of scientists being 'bought' to re-state industry talking points."

The report, which was handed over to the United Nations Human Rights Council in March 2017, also underlined that: "The pesticide industry's efforts... have obstructed reforms and paralyzed global pesticide restrictions globally."

Throwing discredit on IARC, its working group experts and the quality of the scientific work accomplished—these "efforts" are of strategic importance, even vital necessity, to Monsanto.

## Court cases underway in the United States

Close on Monsanto's heels are several U.S. law firms representing victims or relatives of victims who have died of non-Hodgkin's lymphoma (NHL), a rare cancer that affects white blood cells which they attribute to exposure to glyphosate.

For their lawyers, IARC's Monograph 112 constitutes an essential piece of evidence. For Monsanto, Monograph 112 could weigh heavily on the final verdicts. According to legal documents, the amount of damages and other payments in the U.S. could well amount to billions of dollars for the 800 plaintiffs—a number that will "probably" rise to 2,000 by the end of the year, according to Timothy Litzenburg, a lawyer at The Miller Firm.

Confidential memos, spreadsheets and internal briefs: all in all, ten million pages taken from the boxes in Monsanto's archives and from entrails of its PCs. This is the amount of documents that the company has been forced to hand over to the court to date. In the U.S., a procedure called "discovery" allows this kind of raid on the adversary's paperwork.

From the mass of scanned documents, released drip by drip, that are the "Monsanto Papers", the multinational's response plan emerges. Take this "confidential" PowerPoint document dated March 11, 2015, with slides that develop a strategy of influence in the form of "Scientific Projects." Among other ideas, a "comprehensive evaluation of carcinogenic potential" of glyphosate by "credible scientists," and "possibly via Expert Panel Concept" is mentioned. That will be done.

In September 2016, [a series of six articles](#) appeared in the scientific journal *Critical Reviews in Toxicology*. They exonerated glyphosate. But, as the publication was openly "sponsored and supported" by Monsanto, would anything other than this have been possible?

The authors were [the sixteen members of the "glyphosate experts panel"](#) to whom Monsanto confided the task to "review the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC) monograph on glyphosate."

Their recruitment was delegated to Intertek, a consultancy specialized in the production of scientific material for companies facing regulatory or legal difficulties related to their products. Monsanto and its allies also called on the services of Exponent and Gradient, two other firms engaged in the business of "product defense."

## "Glyphosate task force"

The crisis management PowerPoint also envisaged the publication of an article about IARC itself: "How it was formed, how it functions, hasn't evolved over time, they are archaic and not needed now."

The scientist who was suggested as a possible author has published nothing on the issue so far.

However, [an article](#) that perfectly matches the hostile specifications was published in a minor journal in October 2016. IARC's system of classification has "become outmoded" and "serve[s] neither science nor society," wrote the 10 authors.

"This is how eating processed meat can fall into the same category as sulfur mustard gas." IARC's approach, they said, is at the origin of "health scares, unnecessary economic costs, loss of beneficial products, adoption of strategies with greater health costs, and the diversion of public funds into unnecessary research."

It was a very unusual tone for a scientific journal. This is perhaps because *Regulatory Toxicology and Pharmacology* is a special kind of publication. Not only does its [editorial board](#) include numerous industry players and consultants but also its editor in chief, Gio Gori, is a well-known figure in the history of the tobacco industry.

Owned by the powerful scientific publishing group Elsevier, this is the official journal of a supposedly scholarly society, the International Society of Regulatory Toxicology & Pharmacology (ISRTP). No significant information about the society is available on its website and neither Gori nor ISRTP nor Elsevier responded to questions from *Le Monde*. It has therefore not even been possible to identify anyone in charge – let alone its sources of funding. However, last time ISRTP published its sponsors, in 2008, the list of six included Monsanto.

As to the 10 authors of the article, some of them have worked or are currently working for the Swiss group Syngenta, a member of the "glyphosate task force" of the industrial players selling glyphosate products. Some are private consultants. Others are academic scientists and take part in the activities of the scientific lobbying organization, ILSI. Among them are Samuel Cohen, professor of oncology at the university of Nebraska, Alan Boobis, co-president of JMPR, and Angelo Moretto, rapporteur of the same JMPR.

### "Shock tactics"

These three scientists pursued the trail. A few months later, they published on the propaganda website called the Genetic Literacy Project, which had relayed the personal attacks against Christopher Portier, a text claiming that IARC "should be abolished."

The agency was accused of fuelling "chemophobia" among the public. If it is not reformed, they wrote, IARC "should be relegated to the regulatory museum where it belongs, along with other historical artifacts, such as the Model T Ford, the biplane, and the rotary dial telephone."

In scientific circles, convention holds that the author of the first draft of a text takes responsibility for any modifications up until the very last corrections. Which one of the authors wrote these two texts—published by the scientific journal and on the Genetic Literacy Project website? "I can't remember," replied Alan Boobis when asked by *Le Monde*, explaining "it was a whole process," and that the writing had "undergone quite a lot of refinement over the year."

This is "a bit of shock tactic," acknowledged Boobis. Asked why the article was published on this website, Boobis admitted that the Genetic Literacy Project was not famous for its rigour, but explained that the text was refused by a scientific journal.

Their arguments are identical to those of Monsanto and their allies. "This is a very odd position that we've reached that any association with industry whatsoever is regarded immediately as an indication of bias, corruption, confounding, distortion or whatever," answered Boobis.

Is the "abolition" of IARC what Monsanto wants? The corporation did not wish to answer *Le Monde's* questions.

## RELATED ARTICLES AROUND THE WEB

[Monsanto Demands World Health Organization Retract Report That ...](#)

[Monsanto weed killer can 'probably' cause cancer: World Health ...](#)



47m

[Originals](#) →

## Senate spending bill would cut EPA program that assesses chemical risks

An appropriations bill released yesterday calls for elimination of the Integrated Risk Information System as part of an