

Weed killer in your wine and beer? That's what a new U.S. PIRG study found

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A new report by the public-interest advocacy group U.S. PIRG reveals that tests of five wines and 15 beers, including organic ones, found traces of the controversial weed killer glyphosate in 19 out of the 20.

They include brands like Coors Light, Miller Lite, Budweiser, Corona, Heineken, Guinness, Stella Artois and Samuel Adams.

"The levels of glyphosate we found are not necessarily dangerous but are still concerning given the potential health risks," U.S. PIRG said.

Glyphosate, a pesticide and herbicide best known as an ingredient in Monsanto's Roundup, is a probable human carcinogen, according to the International Agency for Research on Cancer, a branch of the World Health Organization.

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Noting the report's acknowledgment that levels are below EPA risk for beverages, a spokesperson for national trade association the Beer Institute responded to USA TODAY saying, "Our members work with farmers who go to great lengths to raise their crops sustainably and safely. ... The results of the most recent federal testing showed farmers' use of glyphosate falls well below federal limits."



A glass of beer being poured. =
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"An adult would have to drink more than 140 glasses of wine a day containing the highest glyphosate level measured just to reach the level that California's Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) has identified as 'No Significant Risk Level,'" wrote a spokesperson for the Wine Institute in a statement to USA TODAY.

USA TODAY reached out to companies whose products were tested. Many contested the accuracy of the PIRG study. Others acknowledged the potential for the presence of herbicides in "trace amounts" beyond their control.

Organic winery Frey Vineyards noted that, while no herbicides "have ever been used" in its farming practices, "glyphosate in trace amounts is now found in rainwater because of its application to conventionally farmed agricultural land. Glyphosate in trace amounts can be found in many food products across the United States. We urge consumers to speak up to ban all use of glyphosate."

Stating that a pesticide is "the last thing you want to think about" as you raise a glass, PIRG wanted to highlight what it sees as a potential danger.

"No matter the efforts of brewers and vintners, we found that it is incredibly difficult to avoid the troubling reality that consumers will likely drink glyphosate at every happy hour and backyard barbecue around the country," said U.S. PIRG Education Fund's Kara Cook-Schultz, who authored the study.

The 2018 Sutter Home Merlot was the wine with the highest concentration of glyphosate at 51.4 parts per billion, or ppb, while in the beer category, it was Tsingtao from Hong Kong with 49.7 ppb. The American beer with the largest trace was Coors Light with 31.1. ppb.

Organic adult beverages were also implicated in the U.S. PIRG research. For example, A 2016 Inkarrri Malbec had 5.3 ppb and a 2017 Samuel Smith Organic Lager, 5.7 ppb.

William Reeves, a toxicologist for Bayer, which now owns Monsanto, accused the group of publicizing misleading information about pesticide residues in food.

"Assuming the greatest value reported, 51.4 ppb, is correct, a 125-pound adult would have to consume 308 gallons of wine per day, every day for life to reach the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's glyphosate exposure limit for humans," he said "To put 308 gallons into context, that would be more than a bottle of wine every minute, for life, without sleeping."

The EPA regulates pesticides growers use on crops grown for human food and setting limits, called tolerances, on how much may remain in or on food in the U.S. For glyphosate, that ranges from 0.1 parts per million for coconuts and peanuts to 400 parts per million for certain non-grass animal feed.

The EPA "found no meaningful risks to human health, including infants and children, when the product is used according to the pesticide label," the EPA said in an email, adding the EPA has so far concluded that glyphosate is "not likely to be carcinogenic" to humans.

The EPA said it's currently reviewing public comments received on its draft human health risk assessment and plans to publish later this year.



A glass of red wine.
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The U.S. PIRG said it purchased all beers and wines in Denver and shipped them in sealed containers to a San Francisco lab they've declined to name.

The first court trial over whether Monsanto's Roundup causes cancer ended in October when a San Francisco judge upheld a jury's verdict that the weed killer did make a groundskeeper who used the herbicide sick but cut the amount due to him from \$289 million to \$78 million. DeWayne Johnson was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma in when he was 42.

This PIRG report comes as the first federal case brought against the company over this issue is to begin in federal court in San Francisco. Plaintiff Edwin Hardeman alleges the Roundup he sprayed caused his non-Hodgkin lymphoma.

"With a federal court looking at the connection between Roundup and cancer today, we believe this is the perfect time to shine a spotlight on glyphosate," Cook-Schultz

said. "This chemical could prove a true risk to so many Americans' health, and they should know that it is everywhere – including in many of their favorite drinks."

More than 9,300 people have filed similar lawsuits across the U.S.