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MEPs protest on Right to Know Day against fake transparency on glyphosate

“Secret Science is not science”

- See also our pictures from the protest on Flickr

Fake transparency: The general trend towards “reading rooms”

Every year, on 28th September, transparency campaigners, governments and international bodies such as UNESCO celebrate International Right to Know Day. The right to access information is a fundamental human right which permits us to participate in democratic decision-making, exercise our rights to freedom of expression, and hold our decision-makers to account. However, as with all rights, the right to information is one that we must continuously fight to defend. Recently we have seen how transparency is rolled back and opacity becomes the order of the day: in the Eurozone's responses to the ongoing economic crisis, in the negotiations behind closed doors on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, and even in areas related to public health or environmental protection. What's more, **even elected representatives** who are supposed to be a part of the decision-making process and who have an explicit mandate to defend the interests of their constituencies, are often **kept in the dark** on key issues. This is evident for example in the ongoing European Parliament inquiries into the Dieselgate emissions scandal, the Panama Papers revelations, and the Luxleaks affair. In all three cases, EU Parliamentarians investigating what went wrong and who should be responsible have a hard time accessing the information they need to do their jobs. Indeed, the only access elected representative get is through a “secure reading room”. If you are wondering what a “reading room” is, don't be ashamed: it's a strange concept. The idea is that the information in the room is so sensitive that it can only be visited for a limited amount of time, and when you enter the room you must sign a confidentiality agreement. Not to mention the fact that you have to hand over all your personal belongings other than a pen and piece of paper. This takes the **“freedom” out of “freedom of information”**, and completely obliterates your right to freedom of expression. It is nothing but **fake transparency**. This is why today, we mark the occasion of **Right to Know Day** by protesting outside the latest “reading room” to join the trend: this time, the reading room was set up by private companies including Monsanto, Syngenta, and other agribusiness companies.

Privatised fake transparency: The case of the Glyphosate Task Force

Glyphosate is the substance found in the most commonly used pesticides in the world, such as Round Up. Having joined forces under the name “Glyphosate Task Force” to get an authorisation from the EU's Food

Safety Agency for glyphosate to be sold on the European market, this group of industry actors [1] selling products containing glyphosate is trying to emulate the reading rooms set up by the European Commission and other governments to avoid making their studies on the health risks of glyphosate publicly available. The studies in question were submitted to EFSA as part of the regulatory process. However, earlier this year, the EU member states failed to agree on whether to re-authorise the use of glyphosate within the EU amid concerns about its safety. Indeed, the **EU's Food Safety Agency EFSA has been shrouded in controversy after declaring – in complete contradiction with the UN World Health Organisation – that glyphosate was probably not carcinogenic**. EFSA has over the years also been the subject of multiple accusations of conflicts of interest and lack of independence in the way their scientific assessments are carried out. So, when asked why their assessment was the opposite of the WHO's assessment, EFSA claimed that it had based its decision on a number of unpublished studies that the WHO had not seen. The Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament has requested access to all these documents, but EFSA has failed so far to publish them, relying on arguments from the companies funding the studies that publication would harm their commercial interests. While EFSA was dithering, the Glyphosate Task Force took it upon themselves to up their own "secure reading room" in Brussels to give limited access to only some of the studies, under strict conditions (no personal belongings including cameras and phones, no digital copies, no search function, etc). But, since access to information is a fundamental right, it is **utterly inappropriate for private companies to think they can take transparency legislation into their own hands**. In addition, the whole point about publishing scientific studies is that they are then accessible for other scientists to review. But this is not the case here: the same industries that have an interest in selling their product are those that research and write the reports that support the safety claims of those same products. This is why we are marking the occasion of International Right to Know Day by protesting outside the reading room to denounce this fake transparency. We want these studies to be made public so that other scientists can verify the findings and replicate the experiments. After all, **"Secret Science is not real science!!!"** **Note to editors:** [1] The Glyphosate Task Force is composed of the following members: ADAMA Agan Ltd., Agria S.A., Agro Trade GmbH, Albaugh UK Limited, Arysta Lifesciences SAS, Barclay Chemicals (Manufacturing) Ltd., Brokden SL, Bros Spolka Jawna B. P. Miranowscy, Cheminova A/S, Coromandel International Ltd, EXCEL CROP CARE(Europe) NV, Helm AG, Industrias Afrasa S.A., Monsanto Europe S.A./N.V., Nufarm GmbH & Co KG, Rotam Agrochemical Europe Limited, Sapec Agro S.A., Sinon Corporation, Société Financière de Pontarlier, Syngenta Limited, United Phosphorus Ltd, Wynca UK Limited.

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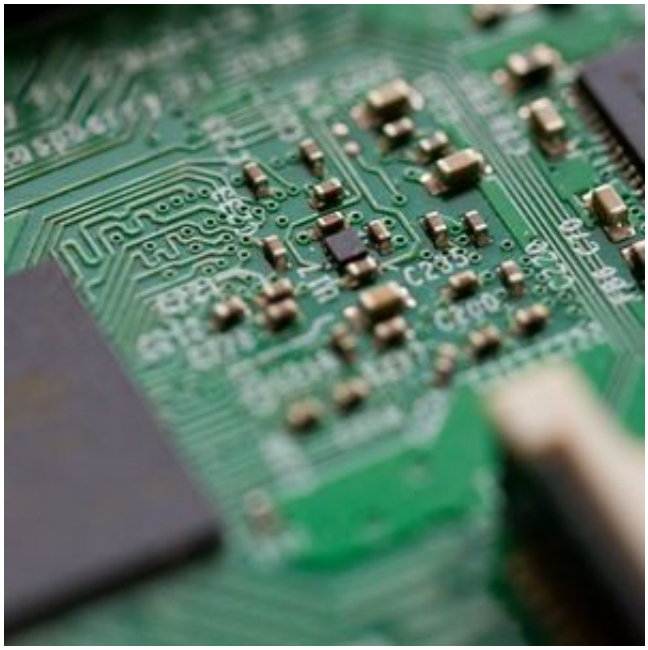


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