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Democracy Dies in Darkness

Bayer, maker of Roundup weedkiller, agrees to pay \$10 billion in cancer settlements

The German company faces tens of thousands of claims that the pesticide is linked to non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

By **Hannah Denham**

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German pharmaceutical and life sciences company Bayer has agreed to pay more than \$10 billion to settle tens of thousands of current and potential U.S. claims that its weedkiller Roundup causes cancer.

The world's largest seed and agrochemical maker announced the settlement in a [news release](#) on Wednesday, saying it will allocate between \$8.8 billion and \$9.6 billion to resolve the current Roundup litigation. It will apply to 75 percent of the 125,000 current filed and unfiled claims that the product leads to non-Hodgkin's lymphoma.

The company will also pay \$1.25 billion for a separate class agreement for potential future claims, which will be subject to approval in the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California by Judge Vince Chhabria.

Bayer has been entangled in a public relations and litigation crisis after it inherited the Roundup brand, which was introduced in the 1970s and grew to be a top-selling herbicide, through a \$63 billion merger with St. Louis-based agribusiness giant Monsanto in 2018. At the time, Monsanto maintained that glyphosate — the active weed-killing ingredient in Roundup — had a history of safe use, and Bayer has echoed that since its acquisition.

But in 2015, the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer labeled the herbicide as “probably carcinogenic to humans.”

Bayer said that the settlement was a unanimous decision from the company's board of management, supervisory board and input from the special litigation committee, adding that the settlement doesn't mean an admission of liability or wrongdoing. Chief executive Werner Baumann said in the statement that the action allows the company to “bring a long period of uncertainty to an end.”

“As a science-based company committed to improving people’s health, we have great sympathy for anyone who suffers from disease, and we understand their search for answers,” Baumann said. “At the same time, the extensive body of science indicates that Roundup does not cause cancer, and therefore, is not responsible for the illnesses alleged in this litigation. We stand strongly behind our glyphosate-based herbicides, which are among the most rigorously studied products of their kind, and four decades of science support their safety and that they are not carcinogenic.”

Glyphosate is fairly cheap and the most commonly used agricultural herbicide in the United States, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. In January, the EPA concluded in its interim registration review decision that it “did not identify any risks of concern” for cancer and non-cancer risks to humans from glyphosate exposure.

In the past two years, California jurors have awarded \$2 billion to a couple, \$80 million to a man, and \$289 million (later reduced to \$78.5 million) to a former groundskeeper who all blamed their cancer diagnoses on Roundup, which led Bayer shares to plummet. The company said in its Wednesday statement that these three cases won’t be covered by the settlement and will continue through the appeals process. Claimants who choose to participate in the settlement will have to dismiss their cases or agree not to file.

For the future class agreement, the company said, an independent Class Science Panel made up of expert scientists will take several years to determine whether Roundup has the potential to cause non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and, if so, at what minimum exposure levels. Those who file claims as part of the class action won't be able to proceed with them until the determination is made.

Access to Roundup products won't change, but Bayer said it would continue to offer customers more herbicide options through its 10-year investment in developing more methods to manage weeds to support sustainable agriculture.

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