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 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*

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**NEWS BRIEFS**

**PIRG CONSUMER WATCHDOG**

**You can cancel your credit card but you cannot cancel your face**

It all started when Six Flags scanned a 14-year-old boy’s thumbprint without permission while issuing him a season pass.

In a landmark case on Jan. 25, the Illinois Supreme Court ruled that people can legally sue companies that unethically gather data, even without proof of injury. The decision reversed a previous ruling that the boy’s family couldn’t sue due to the absence of personal damages.

“Biometric information is uniquely sensitive,” said Abe Scarr, state director of Illinois PIRG. “You can cancel your credit card but you cannot cancel your face. Illinois’ biometric privacy law gives individuals the power to enforce the law when their rights have been violated. We applaud the Illinois Supreme Court for reaffirming consumers’ ability to effectively defend their rights.”

Illinois PIRG has been a leader in stopping two attempts by Facebook and others to gut the
state’s uniquely strong biometric privacy law over the past three years. This ruling gives consumers some much-needed control over their personal information. ■

DEMOCRACY FOR THE PEOPLE

Big donors dominate Chicago mayoral elections, report finds

Chicago’s mayoral candidates ran to represent all of the city’s 2.7 million people. It would be good if their donors represented at least a cross-section of the people, too. But they didn’t.

Illinois PIRG Education Fund’s Feb. 21 report, “Small Donors a Small Factor in Chicago Mayoral Race,” found that the 14 candidates running for mayoral office overwhelmingly raised campaign funds from big money donors, with 97 percent coming from donors giving $1,000 or more.

“Through a small donor matching program, we can ensure voters have real choices on the ballot,” said Illinois PIRG Education Fund Advocate Hannah Kim.

By matching small donations with public funds, the program would amplify the power of small donors—and limit the influence of big money over our elections. ■

STOP THE OVERUSE OF ANTIBIOTICS

Illinois was instrumental in the development of antibiotics -- now it’s trying to save them

Illinois was the birthplace of mass-produced penicillin, a development that allowed the world to access the life-saving drugs. But now, amid a global health crisis, Illinois is working to save these same medicines.

On Feb. 5, Sen. David Koehler introduced the Illinois PIRG-backed Keep Antibiotics Safe Act to ban the routine use of antibiotics in food production. Health professionals have raised alarms about the threat of antibiotic resistance from the overuse of routine antibiotics in livestock.

“Illinois was critical to the development of the modern medical miracle of antibiotics,” said Illinois PIRG State Director Abe Scarr. “Now we can be critical in preserving their effectiveness for future generations by passing the Keep Antibiotics Safe Act.”

Our national network has helped pass similar legislation in California and Maryland and pushed Chicago-based McDonald’s to limit antibiotic use in its beef supply chain. We’re working to build the support it will take to convince Illinois to pass this bill to preserve the antibiotics that it was so instrumental in developing. ■

BE AN ADVOCATE FOR ILLINOIS’ FUTURE

Support our work in the public interest by including a gift to Illinois PIRG or Illinois PIRG Education Fund in your will, trust or retirement accounts.

For more information call 1-800-841-7299 or send an email to: PlannedGiving@illinoispirg.org
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.”

Illinois PIRG’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.

THANKS TO YOU

Dear Illinois PIRG member,

We all want a healthier, safer and more secure future. In recent months, Illinois PIRG 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,

Abe Scarr, State Director
info@illinoispirg.org

U.S. PIRG member Rachel and her family are working to eliminate plastic from their lives.