



PRESS RELEASE

**“Glyphosate in beer” –
statement of the German Brewers Association regarding the
new publication**

Berlin/Munich, Germany, 24 August 2017. In a press release published today, the “Munich Environmental Institute” has reported the discovery of a further sample concerning traces of the herbicide glyphosate in beers.

As the environmental institute established in its first publication in February 2016, traces of glyphosate are to be found “almost everywhere now”. In countless foods containing wheat, state-of-the-art analytical methods can be used to identify minimal and entirely harmless trace quantities – indeed, the substance has also been found in organic foods. Glyphosate has been present for decades in a variety of herbicides that are approved for use in Germany and around the world, and their use is known to leave residues in harvested products and foodstuffs. A variety of official and non-official studies have declared these traces to be safe to public health.

The German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (*Bundesinstitut für Risikobewertung*, BfR) also continues to classify the trace amounts present in foods as safe to public health, as do other European and international institutes (e.g. EFSA, ECHA). The German Brewers Association has confidence in the assessment of independent scientists. As the competent authority, the BfR issued a statement in 2016 regarding the first test by the environmental institute, which was published online and remains applicable: <http://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/349/provisional-assessment-of-glyphosate-contents-in-beer.pdf>

On the basis of the glyphosate values claimed by the environmental institute back in 2016 – on which the Brewers Association had justifiably cast doubt in light of its monitoring activities and the questionable methods of the institute, the BfR concluded that an adult would have to drink 1,000 litres of beer in a single day for these residues to pose a health risk. The environmental institute is also aware of this fact. Despite this, and contrary to better knowledge, it continues to encourage the impression

that there is a health risk even with minute quantities. Through publications such as these, it is apparent that the Munich-based organisation seeks to influence the ongoing debate regarding the extension of the authorisation for glyphosate, which the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) has already advocated on the basis of extensive testing. Unfortunately, the environmental association has chosen to rely on irresponsible fearmongering and misinformation to publicise its political aims.

The German Brewers Association emphasises that breweries in Germany – just like the upstream malt and hops producers – go to great lengths to examine the natural base materials used in brewing under the German Purity Law for any potential contaminants. Our own monitoring system for brewing malt has shown that the measured values are always well below the maximum limits. At no time has a violation of the maximum permissible residue values been identified for glyphosate. There are also governmental controls and other checks internal to the brewing industry that ensure that contaminants do not find their way into production.

Questions & answers

How can glyphosate traces end up in cereals and consequently in beer?

Beer is brewed in Germany using the natural base materials of water, malt, hops and yeast. Malt is obtained from cereals. In Germany, the use of glyphosate in the cultivation of cereals for brewing purposes is not permitted. Even so, it is not possible to entirely eliminate the possibility of there being demonstrable glyphosate residues in brewing wheat or brewing malt, either because these drift from areas where the herbicide is authorised for use into adjacent agricultural crop spaces, or because the use of glyphosate-based products may sometimes be permitted abroad for brewing wheat. Because German agriculture alone is not able to meet the entire demand from German brewers' for malted cereals, around 50 per cent of brewing cereals or brewing malt is imported from abroad, in particular France and Denmark.

Are the trace amounts of glyphosate in beers dangerous to public health?

The German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (*Bundesinstitut für Risikobewertung*, BfR) classifies the trace amounts present in foods as safe to public health, as do other European and international institutes. According to the 2016 statement from the BfR,

“even the highest contents published by the media (30 micrograms per litre) are so low that the estimated intake for an adult (60 kg bodyweight [sic]) would be more than 1000 times lower than the currently estimated amount that can be ingested daily over a lifetime (ADI, acceptable daily intake) or during one day (ARfD, acute reference dose).” According to the BfR, to ingest a dangerous amount of glyphosate, an adult would have to consume around 1,000 litres of beer in one day. The glyphosate content of 30 micrograms per litre of beer does not constitute a health risk based on the latest knowledge (see <http://www.bfr.bund.de/cm/349/provisional-assessment-of-glyphosate-contents-in-beer.pdf>).

Other environmental organisations have since distanced themselves from the “environmental institute”. For instance, addressing the 2016 study, Greenpeace stated that “some studies are also unsatisfactory, however. For instance, although the study regarding the glyphosate content of beer caused panic, one litre of the most heavily contaminated sort – at 29.74 micrograms – represented barely one thousandth of the maximum daily intake. In other words, only if one thousand litres of beer were consumed in a day would humans be exposed to a serious health risk from glyphosate.”

What is the German brewing industry doing to prevent glyphosate contamination?

To ensure maximum safety and quality of the malt used in German breweries, the German Brewers Association operates an internal monitoring system for contaminants in brewing malt, which also includes tests for glyphosate residues. This monitoring has shown that the malts used in German breweries are largely free of glyphosate residues. Where glyphosate is detected in isolated cases, the amounts detected are more than 100 times below the permitted maximum residual level for barley, meaning that it is absolutely safe. The maximum glyphosate residue limit established by law throughout Europe is 20 mg/kg in barley and 10 mg/kg in wheat.

When malted wheat or malt are used in beer, they are diluted to a considerable extent, particularly in comparison to the direct consumption of wheat. Analyses have shown that where crops are potentially contaminated, just 2 per cent of the glyphosate that was originally on the barley can ultimately reach the beer. In practice, several batches of barley are mixed and beers are produced from a variety of malts. Under these circumstances too, many of the test results do not seem plausible.

What position does the German Brewers Association take on the environmental institute's latest publication?

Without knowing the details of this study, it is impossible to comment on the results or compare them against the values of the previous year. As was the case with the random samples from 2016, there are also no detailed results available for the 2017 study, and the analytical methods of this private institute are also not adequately documented, which is why the credibility of this new study is likely to also be questionable.

What official guideline values are there?

There are no guideline values for foods or drinks like beer. If nothing else, the studies published by the Munich Environmental Institute appear to be dubious solely on the basis that they have improperly compared brewed beer – a foodstuff made from wheat – with drinking water. A “limit” is also referred to here, despite there only being a “precautionary value” for drinking water, which has no relevance for public health. Beyond that, even the precautionary value for baby food is higher than for drinking water.

What does the German Purity Law govern?

Unlike other European breweries, German beer breweries are not permitted to this day to use artificial flavourings, artificial colours, artificial stabilisers, enzymes, emulsifiers or preservatives in the beers they brew under the Purity Law. Beer brewing continues to be restricted to the use of the four natural ingredients of water, malt, hops and yeast. All raw materials are subject to continuous and extensive testing for residues and contaminants throughout the processing chain.

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