

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-001633/24
to the Commission
Catherine Griset (Pfe)
(5 September 2024)**

Subject: Stop blaming farmers for glyphosate discharges from industrial and domestic products

According to a study conducted by the German University of Tübingen, additives used in industrial and domestic detergents, particularly washing powder, break down massively in surface water in the form of aminopolyphosphonates (AMPA) ⁽¹⁾.

As these AMPA molecules are the same as those resulting from the spraying of glyphosate by farmers, in actual fact a significant proportion of the glyphosate concentrations found in European soils and waters are not of agricultural origin, but of industrial and domestic origin.

In other words, some of the glyphosate residues blamed on farmers may ultimately have come from aminopolyphosphonates, which are used in Europe in washing powders and detergents, such as anti-scaling products, bleach stabilisers and corrosion inhibitors.

In light of this scientific discovery:

1. Will the Commission carry out comparative studies with the United States, where virtually no aminopolyphosphonates are used in detergents, to determine whether it is possible to reduce the use of this molecule in detergents produced and consumed within the Union?
2. Will the Commission take the initiative of undertaking all the necessary research to determine whether other molecules found in rivers or waste water are unduly attributed to the agricultural sector?

Submitted: 5.9.2024

**Answer given by Executive Vice-President Vestager on behalf of the European Commission
(7 November 2024)**

Many phosphorus compounds, including amino-polyphosphonates, may be present in detergents. In order to reduce their environmental impact and that of their metabolites such as amino-methyl-phosphonic acid (AMPA), an amendment ⁽¹⁾ of the Detergents Regulation ⁽²⁾ in 2012 introduced EU limits on the content of phosphates and other phosphorus compounds in laundry and dishwasher detergents.

Based on an impact assessment ⁽³⁾, the Commission in its 2023 Proposal for a revised Regulation ⁽⁴⁾ maintained the current level of protection, the proposal is under negotiation.

The proposal for a revised Urban Wastewater Treatment Directive ⁽⁵⁾ includes stricter limits on the release of phosphorus from treatment plants and provides for future regulation of the recovery and reuse of this nutrient.

The Commission, in close cooperation with Member State authorities at all levels, is working to prevent water pollution where possible, and to enforce compliance with the water acquis ⁽⁶⁾ and related legislation ⁽⁷⁾ controlling pollutant discharges.

Industry is obliged to report on the substances, including metabolites, in their discharges, including those discharged via the urban wastewater system. Water authorities closely monitor discharges.

If permitted discharge thresholds or environmental quality standards are exceeded, the pollutant sources have to be traced and enforcement measures taken to ensure compliance with existing permits or tighten them. It is in everyone's interest that emissions of substances that threaten health or the environment are minimised.

¹ ¹ https://www.lepoint.fr/environnement/la-majeure-partie-du-glyphosate-dans-les-rivieres-d-europe-ne-viendrait-pas-de-l-agriculture-01-08-2024-2566935_1927.php#11

⁽¹⁾ Regulation (EU) No 259/2012 of the European parliament and of the Council of 14 March 2012 amending Regulation (EC) No 648/2004 as regards the use of phosphates and other phosphorus compounds in consumer laundry detergents and consumer automatic dishwasher detergents, OJ L 94, 30.3.2012, p. 16, <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2012/259/oj>

⁽²⁾ Regulation (EC) No 648/2004 of the European parliament and of the Council of 31 March 2004 on detergents; OJ L 104, 8.4.2004, p. 1-35.

⁽³⁾ SWD(2023) 114 final — Impact assessment accompanying the proposal for a regulation of the European parliament and of the Council on detergents and surfactants, amending Regulation (EU) 2019/1020 and repealing Regulation (EC) No 648/2004.

⁽⁴⁾ Proposal for a regulation of the European parliament and of the Council on detergents and surfactants, amending Regulation (EU) 2019/1020 and repealing Regulation (EC) No 648/2004; COM(2023) 217 final.

⁽⁵⁾ Proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning urban wastewater treatment (recast); COM/2022/541 final.

⁽⁶⁾ In particular Directive 2000/60/EC of the European parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy, OJ L 327, 22.12.2000, p. 1, i.e. the Water Framework Directive, and its daughter directives.

⁽⁷⁾ Including Directive 2010/75/EU of the European parliament and of the Council of 24 November 2010 on industrial emissions (integrated pollution prevention and control) (recast), OJ L 334, 17.12.2010, p. 17.

The Commission is not aware of authorities inappropriately attributing pollution, by AMPA or other substances, to the agricultural sector, and does not consider it necessary to initiate research on this issue.
