

The Roundup Cases



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Executive Summary

Monsanto, a multinational agrichemical company, was caught under fire when their star herbicide Roundup was found to have a possible link to cancer. Leading to a number of lawsuits where Monsanto insisted the safety of their product.

In this white paper the timeline of the Roundup cases will be explored showing what Monsanto, and later Bayer, did correct as well as areas where they could have limited the damage sustained by the company.

Roundup continues to be one of the largest pesticides sold today, be how did these company manage the negative publicity to keep this herbicide as a staple of their company?

Introduction

This white paper presents research findings from an analysis of the crisis event and communications surrounding it that significantly damaged the Monsanto Company and later Bayer AG beginning in the year 2015 and continuing into 2022 and posed risk to all brands associated with the herbicide Roundup.

Background

Between 2015 and 2021 hundreds of lawsuits were fired against Monsanto, acquired by Bayer in 2016, for a connection between Monsanto's popular herbicide Roundup and cancer.

With several loses in court and a few wins, Bayer has paid billions in settlements. But continue to sale Roundup.

Objectives

The research objectives include investigating the following:

- How Monsanto's previous public view influences public perception about this crisis,
- How the media reported and influenced perceptions about the crisis,
- How Bayer as well as other companies responded to the crisis.

Methods

Communication data was gathered from popular digital sources and include excerpts from articles and interviews about the crisis found in online news sources as well as samples of public comments from readers. The data has been coded using the grounded theory.

The data best follows the three phases of crisis communication described by Tulika Varma in his article "Crisis communication in higher education: the use of "negotiation" as a strategy to manage crisis,".

Phase 1: Denial

Phase 2: Minimize Effects

Phase 3: Resolution

Results

Phase 1- Denial

During the Dewayne Johnson case Bayer asked for the trial to be thrown out. Stating the jury had insignificant information to accurately determine the link between Glyphosate and Johnson's cancer.

Trying to dissolve the public opinion that links Round up to cancer. Bayer cites the decades of safe use as well as the hundreds of tests and health studies. Blaming themselves for the lack of knowledge of the science behind the safe continuation of use of Roundup.

"I feel sorry for Mr. Johnson... the jury verdict the decision is wrong, and it doesn't change the science... the science didn't resonate with that jury we want to understand why." -Scott Partridge, Senior Vice President, Bayer U.S.

"The jury's decision is wholly at odds with over 40 years of real-world use, an extensive body of scientific data and analysis ... which support the conclusion that glyphosate-based herbicides are safe for use and do not cause cancer in humans," Bayer said in a statement

Phase 2- Minimize Effects

During 2018, the merger between Monsanto and Bayer closed. The Bayer executives decided to drop the Monsanto brand.

A number of issues with the public opinion of Monsanto led to Bayer dropping the name. Including the increasing issue surrounding Roundup and Generically Modified crops. Bayer hopes to start with a new face of the company to help take diminish the history of public outrage around Monsanto.

"Monsanto is kind of the poster child for a larger movement against GMO," said Katherine Paul, associate director of the Organic Consumers Association

"Bayer will remain the company name," the German company said this week.

"Monsanto will no longer be a company name. The acquired products will retain their brand names and become part of the Bayer portfolio."

Phase 3- Resolution

In 2021 Bayer, trying to resolve the on slot of lawsuits, sets aside 9.6 billion dollars to settle 125,000 claims linking Roundup to non-Hodgkin lymphoma. Hoping to prevent these cases from going to court where Bayer continues to lose in nearly every case.

Bayer also taking steps to prevent future lawsuits. This includes making Roundup a restricted use pesticide only available to those with proper licensing. Noting that most claims come from people using Roundup on their lawn and home gardens.

Bayer may also add a warning label on their Glyphosate products referencing the 2015 World Health Organization statement calling Glyphosate a probable carcinogen to humans.

“This move is being made exclusively to manage litigation risk and not because of any safety concerns,” the company said in a press release

“This action largely eliminates the primary source of future claims,” it said in the release. In 2023, Bayer will begin to replace glyphosate with new ingredients that are still waiting for EPA review.

Decision/ Conclusion

Roundup the originally developed in the 70's and over the 50 years It has been on the market, a number of critics have spoken out against its use. Spouting the link between Glyphosate and Cancer.

Before the main lawsuits began, then Monsanto already had bad public opinion over their involvement in the production of genetically modified crops as well as harsh legal tactics preventing farmers from replanting seeds.

As Roundup became a household name, not in a good way, Monsanto continues to dig their heels in proclaiming the safety of the product. Spending millions on advertising and lawsuits trying to tilt public opinion to realize the many benefits of the revolutionary herbicide.

Once Bayer purchased Monsanto, they relied the true negative the Monsanto and Roundup brands were having on the company.

They proceeded to take steps to limit the risks of lawsuits as well as distancing themselves from the Monsanto name.

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