

Dr. Ralph J. Cicerone
President, National Academy of Sciences
500 Fifth Street NW
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Dr. Cicerone:

The Congress passed PL 109-469 with an almost unanimous vote and it was quickly signed into law by the President. Sec. 1111 provides a “Requirement For Scientific Study Of Mycoherbicide In Illicit Drug Crop Eradication”:

(a) Requirement- Not later than 90 days after the date of enactment of this Act, the Director of the Office of National Drug Control Policy shall submit to the Congress a report that includes a plan to conduct, on an expedited basis, a scientific study of the use of mycoherbicide as a means of illicit drug crop elimination by an appropriate Government scientific research entity, including a complete and thorough scientific peer review. The study shall include an evaluation of the likely human health and environmental impacts of mycoherbicides derived from fungus naturally existing in the soil.

(b) Study- The study required by this section shall be conducted in United States territory and not in any foreign country.

The topic of mycoherbicides as a means of drug crop control has an extensive and somewhat controversial history, with most of the debate taking place in the government and NGO policy area. Recognizing that policy makers needed to be better informed by legitimate science, the Congress directed that this scientific study be conducted. We concur with the stated intent of ONDCP to request that the National Academy of Sciences convene a panel, under the auspices of the National Research Council to conduct the study.

We are pleased that the NRC is considering this project and look forward to a charter that addresses the specific and in-depth scientific issues and is completely devoid of policy, legal, international relations and political influences. Listed below are some of the scientific issues that we believe should be considered:

- Are the proposed fungal pathogens effective?
- Can the effectivity be improved through research?
- Does the Tashkent poppy research need to be independently replicated?
- Do the proposed fungal pathogens persist in soils?
- Do the proposed fungal pathogens kill other soil fungi?
- Are the proposed fungal pathogens host-plant specific?
- Do the proposed fungal pathogens harm licit crops?
- Do the proposed fungal pathogens mutate rapidly?
- Do the proposed fungal pathogens threaten biodiversity?
- Do the proposed fungal pathogens harm the environment?
- Does the mycotoxicity of the proposed fungal pathogens harm animal or human health?
- Must the proposed fungal pathogens be tested in tropical environments?

The NRC should develop an aggressive schedule that is responsive to the direction of law for an expedited study. It should review the state of the art by inviting presentations from experts and advocates of mycoherbicides for weed and illicit drug crop control (including proprietary

information if required). As this is a highly specialized area, with much of the expertise residing outside of the United States, we believe that it is important for the NRC to invite the participation of international specialists. It should also request briefings from specialists from regulatory agencies, including the EPA and USDA's Animal Plant Health Inspection Service.

Finally we request that, as a minimum, the study committee incorporate the type of scientific expertise listed below.

- A chairman who is a plant pathologist and mycologist and who is familiar with the rapidly developing field of biological control of weeds. A distinguished member or former member of the American Phytopathological Society would seem an appropriate choice.
- Several plant pathologists with expertise in the research, development and practical utilization of mycoherbicides for biological control of weeds or plants. Given the small number of highly qualified practitioners in this area, we encourage the NRC to also consider international experts to participate.
- A bioherbicide development specialist with practical experience in development, production and licensing of mycoherbicides
- A specialist on biological control risks
- A plant disease epidemiologist
- An environmental mycologist (or mycoecologist) familiar with the epidemiology of fungal diseases
- A fungal geneticist knowledgeable about issues of mutability
- A mycotoxicologist familiar with the proposed fungal pathogens
- A human health expert familiar with fungal diseases

I urge you to convene this panel as quickly as feasible and to provide ONDCP and the Congress with a completed report as soon as practicable. I look forward to having further discussions with you about how best to focus and structure this effort.

Sincerely,

Dana Rohrabacher

cc:

Other committee members?

John Walters, ONDCP