**Glyphosate – Q&A**

**What is glyphosate?**

Glyphosate is the active ingredient in certain herbicides. It works by blocking a particular metabolic pathway in plants which then kills the plant. It is not specific to any one type of plant and is known as a ‘total herbicide’.

**Is glyphosate dangerous for Network Rail staff and contractors?**

We understand there is some concern about the use of glyphosate in other countries. The safety of our workforce – as well as passengers and lineside neighbours – is our priority. We only use herbicides which are fully licenced by the Health and Safety Executive’s (HSE) Chemicals Regulation Division (CRD), which is responsible for the regulation of biocides, pesticides and detergents in the UK. We also ensure that all staff and contractors are fully trained to use glyphosate safely.

**Aren’t there other ways to manage weeds by the lineside? Is using glyphosate absolutely necessary?**

Over the last 10 years, we have reduced the use of herbicides dramatically by improving our methods and more careful targeting – for example by using weed recognition control systems to reduce the quantities applied. The total weight of all active ingredients of herbicides applied in 2018 was 69% lower than in 2006, while there has also been a 25% reduction in the use of glyphosate specifically since 2008.

We constantly analyse and scrutinise our processes, updating them to reflect the latest scientific developments. We are open to exploring alternatives and continue to carry out research into possible other suitable options, including methods such as hot foam, steam, increased ballast cleaning and even hand pulling.

In the meantime, this product remains our best option in terms of efficacy, safety and cost, and complies with all relevant legislation and safety standards established to ensure it does not harm human health or have unacceptable effects on the environment. We continue to work to ensure our use of herbicides is the minimum necessary to effectively manage our lineside vegetation.

**What standards and legislation controls our use of herbicides?**

The herbicides we use meet strict safety standards set by the Health and Safety Executive who work to ensure they do not harm human health or have unacceptable effects on the environment. The only herbicides we use are those included in the protocol we have signed with the Environment Agency, Water UK and Natural Resources Wales.

**Why does Network Rail use glyphosate?**

At the moment, the safest and most effective way of keeping the track area clear of weeds is to use glyphosate-based herbicides. As above, we continue to carry out research into possible alternatives and ensure our methods reflect the latest scientific developments.

**How do we use herbicides?**

The targeted use of herbicides, such as glyphosate, is an important part of our overall vegetation management procedures.

Glyphosate is our primary herbicide for preventing weed growth in the ballasted area around the railway track. We use specialist equipment on a train to spray directly down onto the tracks and ballast.

We also specify its targeted use, applied by hand, to treat Japanese knotweed and use it on the stumps of specific trees where we know regrowth would pose a risk to the railway.

In all other situations, the use of herbicides would be specified by a qualified member of staff to make sure the dosage used and the treatment programme is the minimum necessary. The qualifications are issued by BASIS, an independent charitable organisation which sets standards and conducts audits for the pesticide, fertiliser and allied industries.