

RML Newsletter round-up

June 2016

GLYPHOSATE DEBATE CONTINUES...

Herbicides containing the active ingredient Glyphosate are among the most widely-used pesticides in the world. Glyphosate has low direct toxicity to mammals, making it much less hazardous than once-common weedkillers such as 'Paraquat', but there has been increasing concern and debate about whether Glyphosate is carcinogenic.

The International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC), a branch of the World Health Organization, published a study classifying glyphosate as 'probably carcinogenic to humans' but conversely, the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) published a risk assessment concluding that 'glyphosate is unlikely to pose a carcinogenic hazard to humans'. These diverging opinions have developed into a major controversy involving scientists and public bodies.

The current [EU approval for Glyphosate expires at the end of June](#) (having been extended from December 2015 to allow time for a new decision) but the EU member states are still unable to reach a qualified majority decision on renewal of the approval.

MEPs have called for an independent review and the publication of all the scientific evidence that the EFSA used to assess Glyphosate. The MEPs' non-binding resolution calls on the Commission to renew the approval only for 7 years, and not the 15 years proposed.

[The Commission should not approve any non-professional uses of glyphosate, say MEPs, and Glyphosate should not be approved for use in or close to public parks, public playgrounds and public gardens.](#)

So what next?

Pesticides undergo a dual authorisation process: first, active substances are authorised at EU level by the European Commission (based on a risk assessment by EFSA and an opinion issued by a standing committee of Member State representatives). Plant protection products containing these active substances are then authorised at national level if member state governments choose to do so.

On the 1st June, the Commissioner for Health and Food Safety urged member states to approve the renewal of the authorisation, so that member states' governments could then authorise products or not as they saw fit. Should there be no extension, member states would have to withdraw the authorisations for plant protection products containing glyphosate from their market.

What's all this got to do with me?

Although Japanese Knotweed treatment accounts for only a microscopic proportion of the 825 million tonnes of Glyphosate used each year, Glyphosate products are the most significant tool we have to control this highly-invasive plant. Withdrawal of authorisation before viable alternatives are available would make knotweed control almost impossible in many locations, particularly those where full excavation is not possible, or would be even more destructive than the knotweed itself. Other herbicides are restricted to professional use because of hazards to the operator and the environment. Landfill disposal for excavated materials is unsustainable and prohibitively expensive. On-site solutions such as our *KLARO* are not practical on small or inaccessible sites.



The decision-makers must find a graduated position based on the balance of risks – to the environment and to the people involved – and if they decide that Glyphosate is potentially carcinogenic then the solution is to avoid or reduce exposure routes rather than to withdraw the substance altogether and then deal with the unintended consequences

Kind regards

Steve

Principal Landscape Manager
Richards, Moorehead & Laing Ltd.

June 2016

THE ENGINEER AND THE ARTIST.

'Elephants for want of towns'

A few months ago I mentioned an occasion in school when I was asked to write an essay on buttons and I managed to turn that newsletter into a discussion about the great variety of slopes that one can encounter as a civil engineer. In an essay group in the geography department at UCL in the 1950s I was asked to write on 'The geographer and the artist'. I dived into the library at Bentham Hall, my hall of residence, seeking inspiration and in the Oxford Dictionary of Quotations I soon found Swinburne's lines about how "Geographers in Afric-maps, with savage-pictures fill their gaps; and o'er uninhabitable downs place elephants for want of towns". My main focus as a geographer was on maps and mapmakers. Swinburne set me off, I was up and away, discussing how early map-makers

used their skills as artists and vivid imaginations to fill the empty gaps on their maps. I had to read the essay to our tutorial group and got an A+ for it; the lecturer was very pleased with my effort in thinking outside the box. That seems, indeed it was, such a long time ago.

Then, in 2011, I was very pleased to hear that our project in Dorchester had attracted the attention of an artist. RML had designed a concrete skate park that had been built by our construction team. As it happens the park had been built on an unsightly bit of ground, a gap in the town if you like. I used photographs of the park in a newsletter in September last year as an example of how we create patterns on different pages and are usually pleased with the result. I like to think that as with the cartographers of old we are using our skills and imaginations to fill gaps.

The artist in Dorchester, Paul Dilworth, was very taken with the pattern that had been created by the new skate park and painted a view of it. Paul submitted his painting as an entry for the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition in 2011. A Water Conservator friend of mine, Nigel Cartwright, is a guide at the Academy and he told me about Paul's entry which had been selected for hanging in the exhibition. A short discussion with Paul followed and I bought the painting which I am very proud to hang in my office. The painting has pride of place.



Dorchester skatepark by Paul Dilworth (2011)

I think that it is fair to say that although we have received many compliments about the impact which our work has had, and quite often that people have described the results that RML have produced as 'pretty as a picture' or words to that effect, so far as we know, none other than Paul have actually felt inspired to paint one. Paul used his own skill and imagination to do something about it.

I am particularly thrilled with what Paul has done and have been pleased to tell him so.

One will find many paintings of famous engineering structures in 1, Great George Street, the home of the Institution of Civil Engineers, so there has been a long tradition of artists admiring and recording the work of engineers. Our skate park is modest enough but Paul's painting is part of a long tradition in which map makers, engineers and artists continue to inspire one another.

I have commented before about the pity that so much of value that engineers produce is buried on site and out of sight but when the result lies above ground it is particularly pleasing when someone records it using a very personal medium. Life is full of surprises.

Kind regards

Ivor

Managing Director
Richards, Moorehead & Laing Ltd.

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Never tell English jokes to foreigners even if you are good friends.

On one visit to Iserlohn in Germany I was visiting the Iserlohner brewery and climbing past a huge open vat of foaming beer when I told my friends, in German, that my uncle had fallen into a vat of beer and drowned, but only after he had got out twice to go to the toilet. They were most concerned for my uncle.

Languages are easy, the majority of 3 year olds seem to pick them up from their parents without much difficulty. So what's the problem? Well German verbs can be difficult, mutation of nouns can create difficulties for learners in Welsh, but one soon gets used to it, and the French just speak too quickly don't they?

Learning to speak a second language is where difficulties can emerge but having got that out of the way learning to speak a third language is easier. It seems that when you dream in a foreign language it shows that you are settling in. Even after not having had much exposure to German for several years I occasionally dream in German but never in French.

At RML we have worked in Estonian, Spanish, French, Italian and German with the help of people who have these different languages as their mother tongue. Welsh is the mother tongue for about half of my colleagues and some clients and public bodies find this extremely useful. I understand that road signs in Welsh can cause problems for some visitors, 'ffyrdd eraill' and 'canol y dre' for example.

At first, when being driven around in France and Germany I too wondered where towns called 'Toutes directions' and 'Stadt mitte' were.

In the office we have learned that constant involvement is the only way to keep skills in languages fresh. In this respect we have had some problems since our most significant work for foreign clients in recent years has been in the Republic of Ireland though even here our report to the City of Cork was discussed in Gaelic at a public meeting; that was interesting. Ruthin's twin town lies in Brittany and when we meet visitors Breton and French have to be used as well as Welsh and English.

Verbal communication is only part of the picture since we produce drawings and charts too. AutoCAD is international but the shapes produced in AutoCAD may not necessarily convey every part of a message and this is where words come into their own and technical glossaries are important.

Some years ago a friend was undertaking a degree in French as a mature student and she came to me looking for ideas of what she could do as her 'project' within the degree course. In no time at all I suggested that she could write a glossary for me in English and French and that I would provide the English version after I had expanded in simple English what the technical words meant to a non-technical person. The lecturer rejected this idea in the first place and I had to explain to him the language challenges that this glossary would involve. My friend passed with flying colours and a copy of the glossary stands on my shelf.

One of the most useful books that I ever bought was 'Civil Engineering in French' by Mr. A Paulus published by Thomas Telford in 1982, ISBN 0 7277 0138 X. The foreword by Sir Alan Harris was

enlightening; he relates how the French have no word for 'design' which can create difficulties and some fun too as can the 'lower register' of a language as Sir Alan called site usage.

I found this joke in the Financial Times many, many years ago;

Michael was spending a weekend in Paris with his Parisian friends who were husband and wife, Jean Claude and Marie Claire. Over coffee one morning Jean Claude asked Mike to explain what an Englishman's 'stiff upper lip' was compared with 'sang-froid'? "Well" Mike said, "It's a bit like this, you come home from the office early one day and as you enter the hallway you realise that your wife is in bed with her lover and you leave quietly and return home at your normal time as if everything is normal that is sang-froid and it could involve him being a bit stiff upper lipped about it all." "Hmm" said Jean Claude "I would call that laissez-faire rather than sang-froid. It seems to me that when you come home and discover that your wife is making love to her lover and you bid them to continue that would be sang-froid." Nonsense" said Marie Claire "Now that is laissez-faire. It is when you find your wife in bed with her lover and they continue to make love that is sang-froid". "Oh no, no, no" said Jean Claude "that is savour-faire".

Kind regards

Ivor

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