

Late last month, Colombia's Council for Dangerous Drugs formally approved a pilot program for use of the granular herbicide tebuthiuron in the eradication of coca. *If tebuthiuron is accepted for use and incorporated into the aerial spray program, it could greatly increase the pace of successful eradication; however, many of the same socioeconomic and political challenges confronting the eradication program today will remain even if a granular herbicide is adopted.* In addition, the producer of tebuthiuron has indicated that it will refuse to sell the herbicide for purposes of coca eradication.

While testing protocols still need to be designed and approved, tests previously conducted by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) in Peru and Panama found that application of 4 pounds per acre of granular tebuthiuron is a more efficient killer of coca than the currently used herbicide, glyphosate, and is also environmentally safe if correctly applied. *The use of a more capable granular herbicide would also reduce the washout problems associated with glyphosate.*<sup>1</sup>

- Although the pace of eradication in 1997 has continued at high levels, poor weather hampered spray attempts in June, according to the US Embassy. Pilot reporting also indicates that poor weather reduced spray efforts in May and to a lesser extent in March and April.

There are potential problems associated with the use of the granular herbicide that suggest program planners would need to ensure that the applications are precise and that coca fields do not receive multiple doses. Unlike glyphosate, the granular herbicide does not quickly break down and become inert, posing a potential for residual effects.

- *Any destruction of licit agriculture, negative environmental impact, or health problems resulting from the use of tebuthiuron—however minimal or unintentional—could prompt a backlash of anti-American sentiment in Colombia and possibly throughout the region.*

<sup>1</sup> Glyphosate, more commonly known by its trade name Round-up, is a water-soluble compound. According to USDA research, glyphosate is consistently effective only under near-ideal conditions; rainfall or the use of sprinkler irrigation within 48 hours after application and manual defoliation or the rapid harvesting of leaves will significantly reduce glyphosate's effectiveness.

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*Regional market forces, the economic realities of the coca industry, lack of government control over coca-growing areas, and the tenuous security situation—significant problems that plague the eradication program today—will still be present even if a granular herbicide is adopted.*

- For example, spraying out of Larandia, Caqueta—put on hold during the hostage negotiations between the Colombian Government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia and then further delayed for security reasons—finally began in mid-July; however, spray aircraft received heavy ground fire,