

SERUM DIOXIN REPORT PRESS RELEASE

This is the 29 March 1991 press release from the USAF Surgeon General that accompanied the release of the Serum Dioxin Analysis Report.

The Air Force released the fourth report on the health of former Air Force personnel exposed to Agent Orange and its dioxin contaminant during the Vietnam war. Previous reports focused on health differences between men who sprayed agent orange (the Ranch Hand group) and a group of men who did not work with the herbicides. This most recent report uses the actual blood level of dioxin to identify relationships between agent orange and health problems. This is the first large-scale scientific study to use an accurate measure of exposure to agent orange.

The Centers for Disease Control tested blood for dioxin from 866 Ranch Hand personnel and 804 veterans in the comparison group. The Ranch Hand group had high levels of dioxin in their blood and the comparisons had much lower levels. This suggests that Ranch Hands had more exposure to agent orange than any other military group.

There was no evidence of a relationship between dioxin and cancer of any kind, liver disease, heart disease, kidney disease, immune system disorders, psychological abnormalities or nervous system disease. But, diabetes, body fat, non-cancerous growths (most of these were accumulations of fat under the skin), cholesterol, and three blood counts increased as dioxin increased. These results suggest that dioxin may affect levels of blood sugar and fat and act as an irritant to the body. Some lung function tests and testicle size decreased when dioxin levels rose, but the meaning of these results is unclear. Birth defects will be covered in a separate report available this summer. There were no relationships between dioxin and other diseases. Air Force scientists caution against applying these results directly to all Vietnam veterans. Other studies have shown that dioxin levels are usually below 10 parts per trillion (ppt) in veterans who did not handle large quantities of Agent Orange as part of their jobs. Many Ranch Hand men had levels much higher than 10 ppt.

This report identifies important relationships between dioxin and health. We do not know whether dioxin affects health directly or is only one step in a series of events. Additional studies following the next physical examination in 1992 may help answer this question.

This work is part of a continuing research study at the Armstrong Laboratory, Human Systems Division, Brooks AFB, Texas.

If you would like more information about this report, contact Det 4 AL/EKS, Brooks AFB TX, 78235-5301. From any of the 50 United States, Puerto Rico, Canada, Bermuda, Bahamas, and Jamaica call 1-800-531-7231. From all other points call DSN 240-2127 or Commercial 512-536-3309.