



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
Veterans Benefits Administration
Washington DC 20420

1000 10/20/95

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In Reply Refer To: 211B

Admiral E. R. Zumwalt, Jr., USN (Retired)

Dear Admiral Zumwalt:

Thank you for your recent letter enclosing a copy of "Veterans and Agent Orange--Health Effects of Herbicides Used in Vietnam" commissioned by the Australian government and completed by medical Professors Robert MacLennan and Peter Smith.

The Australian report was based, in part, on review of the 1993 report by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) and was designed to apply the NAS findings to Australian veterans of the Vietnam Conflict. You have suggested that VA include leukemia on the list of diseases for which presumptive service connection is allowed based on the Australian report.

The July 1993 NAS report assigned leukemia to a category labeled "inadequate/insufficient evidence to determine whether an association exists", meaning that the available studies are of insufficient quality, consistency, or statistical strength to permit a conclusion regarding the presence or absence of an association with herbicide exposure.

The potential evidence for an association between herbicide exposure and leukemia comes primarily from studies of farmers and residents of Seveso, Italy. The studies of farmers did not control for other confounding exposures but when the farmers were stratified by herbicide exposure, the incidence of leukemia was generally not elevated, and when found, appeared to be due to factors other than herbicide exposure. The suggestive evidence of increased risk in the studies of Seveso, Italy was considered not significant because of the small number of actual cases in which leukemia was found. Furthermore, since none of the studies demonstrated a dose-response for any subtype of leukemia, NAS concluded that it was not possible to attribute leukemia to herbicide exposure.

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After reviewing that report, the Secretary determined that the credible evidence against an association between leukemia and herbicide exposure outweighs the credible evidence for such an association and he determined that a positive association does not exist. This decision was published in the Federal Register on January 4, 1994.

The next NAS report is due in July, 1995. VA will not be publishing any additional regulations on the issue of diseases associated with exposure to herbicides used in the Republic of Vietnam until it has had the opportunity to evaluate that next report.

Your continued interest in this issue is appreciated.

Sincerely yours,



J. Gary Hickman, Director
Compensation and Pension Service