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Agent Orange linked to prostate cancer

BY TOM ANDERSON

SYDNEY, March 15 (UPI) — The Australian government Wednesday officially recognized a link between prostate cancer and the use of Agent Orange, a defoliant widely used during the Vietnam war.

The recognition allows Australian veterans to receive benefits for the disease caused by exposure to herbicides during widespread spraying of Vietnam during the war, Con Sciacca, federal Veterans Affairs Minister said.

A committee of independent medical experts known as the Repatriation Medical Authority (RMA) suggested a link between cancer of the prostate and exposure to herbicides such as Agent Orange, Sciacca said.

The findings of the RMA were made official Wednesday by the government.

"In making this important decision, the RMA has carefully reviewed all of the material that is contained in the medical journals," Sciacca said.

"In addition members of the authority had discussed the matter with other world leading experts."

The decision follows the federal government's acceptance of a report of an expert committee late last year that reported that certain other cancers and conditions were related to herbicide exposure.

Sciacca said the RMA had been unable to find sufficient evidence of a casual relationship between one form of cancer — leukemia — and exposure to herbicides.

He said, the Repatriation Committee has decided to stick with its earlier decision and has made independent regulations which will continue to allow leukemia to be accepted as related to herbicide exposure in Vietnam.

"The decision by Australian authorities to accept both prostate cancer and leukemia as casually connected to service in Vietnam means that Australian veterans receive more benefits for Agent Orange-related diseases than their United States counterparts," Sciacca said.

He said the U.S. Administration of Veterans Affairs has not accepted that herbicide exposure could be related to prostate cancer or Leukemia.

John Printz, Australian Veterans Association Association president said the decision was long overdue.

Printz said the veterans had to endure a royal commission, a parliamentary inquiry and scientific examination of the effects of Agent Orange for more than 14 years before finally being awarded entitlements.