



THE UNDER SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS FOR BENEFITS

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20420

MAR 27 1996

Admiral E. R. Zumwalt, Jr., USN (Retired)  
Chairman, Agent Orange Coordinating Council  
1000 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 3105  
Arlington, VA 22209-3901

211A

Dear Admiral Zumwalt:

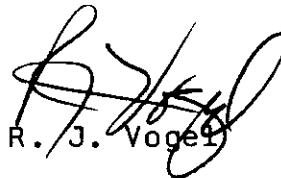
I enjoyed talking with you recently about the second report issued by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) and its impact on the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

On March 14, 1996, in accordance with Public Law 102-4, the Agent Orange Act of 1991, the NAS issued the second report concerning the health effects of exposure to herbicides. On the same day, the Secretary announced the formation of a task force to conduct a review of the NAS findings and to make recommendations to him within the 60 days provided by Public Law 102-4.

After carefully reviewing both the NAS report and the task force recommendations, the Secretary will determine whether presumptive service connection is warranted for any diseases. Once he has done so, VA will take any action necessary to implement that decision within the next 60 days, as required by the Agent Orange Act of 1991.

I am enclosing a copy of the press release dated March 14, 1996, in case you have not seen a copy. Again, I appreciate your continued interest in this sensitive issue and the impact it will have on veterans and their families.

Sincerely yours,

  
R. J. Vogel

Enclosure

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Department of  
Veterans Affairs

Office of Public Affairs  
News Service

Washington, D.C. 20420  
(202) 273-5700

## News Release

*Fly #3*

EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE AT 12 NOON MARCH 14 *report*

### VA TO REVIEW NAS REPORT ON AGENT ORANGE EXPOSURE

Washington -- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is announcing it will conduct an indepth review of a recent report issued by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) on the health effects of exposure to Agent Orange and other herbicides.

Reviewing the latest scientific studies, NAS found that there is new limited or suggestive evidence to show an association with acute and subacute peripheral neuropathy (a neurological disorder) in Vietnam veterans, and spina bifida (a congenital abnormality) in their children.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jesse Brown said: "I am deeply concerned about the suggestion that the children of Vietnam veterans may be at higher risk for spina bifida. I have instructed VA's Veterans Health Administration to move quickly to provide a thorough evaluation of this issue. I want to ensure that studies are conducted so that we can provide answers that will address the concerns of Vietnam veterans and their families."

Brown said that, in response to the report, VA will vigorously pursue research on the reproductive health of Vietnam veterans. He has ordered a task force, in consultation with veterans organizations and other interested parties, to conduct the review and make recommendations to him within <sup>60</sup>~~90~~ days.

The decisions follow today's release of a follow-up to NAS's first report, issued in July 1993, which found that sufficient evidence exists of an association between herbicide exposure and soft-tissue sarcoma, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, Hodgkin's disease, chloracne and porphyria cutanea tarda. VA announced at that time that Hodgkin's disease and porphyria cutanea tarda (a liver disorder) would be added to the department's list of diseases for disability compensation purposes. VA had previously recognized soft-tissue sarcoma, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and chloracne as being associated with herbicide exposure and Vietnam service, and had been paying compensation to Vietnam veterans for these conditions.

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Also at that time, Brown ordered a VA task force to review the evidence for the diseases for which NAS found only limited or suggestive evidence of an association with herbicides of the kinds used in Vietnam: respiratory cancers (lung, larynx and trachea), prostate cancer and multiple myeloma (a cancer involving the bone marrow). As a result of the task force review, conducted in consultation with veterans groups and other interested parties, Brown announced in September 1993 that Vietnam veterans suffering from respiratory cancers and multiple myeloma would be awarded disability compensation based on presumed exposure to Agent Orange and other herbicides.

In 1995, NAS established a new 16-member committee to reexamine earlier scientific studies and review newly published ones on the association between diseases and exposure to dioxin and other herbicides.

VA had requested that the committee focus special attention on prostate cancer, peripheral neuropathy, hepatobiliary cancer and nasopharyngeal cancer, but there was no change in category for these conditions.

In its latest report, the committee concluded that porphyria cutanea tarda should be moved from the category of sufficient evidence of association to that of limited/suggestive evidence of an association. Brown has determined that, despite the change in category, there is no basis to change the compensation regulation. "VA will continue to compensate Vietnam veterans with this condition, based on their Vietnam service and presumed exposure to herbicides," said Brown.

The committee also moved skin cancer from the category of limited/suggestive evidence of no association to inadequate/insufficient evidence to determine whether an association exists.

Two additional conditions were placed in the category of limited/suggestive evidence of an association: acute and subacute peripheral neuropathy, and spina bifida in offspring. In this category, according to NAS, the evidence is suggestive of an association between herbicides and outcome but is limited because chance, bias and confounding could not be ruled out with confidence. At least one high quality study shows a positive association, but the results of other studies are inconsistent.

VA is in the process of establishing the task force to review the evidence NAS used to arrive at its conclusions. In addition, VA will pursue research on birth defects among children of Vietnam veterans and reproductive health effects of Vietnam service.

Specifically, VA is conducting the Vietnam Women Veterans Reproductive Health Study and will be contributing funds for the NAS National Research Council's project on reproductive toxicology.

VA also will consult with reproductive epidemiologists to explore all other avenues for studies on the associations between herbicides and birth defects, particularly neural tube defects.

Vietnam veterans who believe they have health problems that may be related to their exposure to Agent Orange while serving in Vietnam should contact the nearest VA medical center or regional office. VA's nationwide toll-free number is 1-800-827-1000.

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(Dist: 3,5,7,9,10)

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MEMORANDUM

From: David A. Butler, PhD  
Study Director/Senior Program Officer  
To: Admiral E.R. Zumwalt  
Agent Orange Coordinating Council  
Date: May 16, 1996  
Subject: Herbicide Exposure Assessment and Vietnam Veterans

I'm writing to alert you to an upcoming workshop on herbicide exposure assessment and Vietnam veterans, and to solicit your interest in participating in it.

The Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences will be holding a workshop on May 22 in Washington, DC to address issues related to the development and evaluation of models of herbicide exposure for use in studies of Vietnam veterans. The workshop is being held in the Foundry Building, 1055 Thomas Jefferson Street, N.W. in room 2004 between 10am and 6pm. It is being held in conjunction with a meeting of an IOM committee which will be developing a request for proposals (RFP) on this exposure research, and its intent is to highlight critical issues for the consideration of the committee as they write the RFP. These issues will likely include the use and appropriateness of various exposure surrogates; means of employing and combining existing databases regarding troops, terrain, and herbicide use; the need for and form of new data gathering efforts; use of biochemical techniques to detect low levels of dioxin; strengths and weakness of various modeling approaches; and means of model validation. Present plans call for the RFP to be circulated later this year and for Department of Veterans Affairs to subsequently fund one or more research proposals generated in response to the RFP.

Please contact me via phone or fax at your earliest convenience concerning your interest in participating in the workshop; my address and phone numbers listed above. I look forward to hearing from you.



My apologies for not getting this invitation to you sooner. Your letter went out with an incorrect address.