

AGENT ORANGE AND RELATED ISSUES

July 1993

THE VIETNAM CONFLICT

¶ 9.2 million military personnel served on active duty during the Vietnam Era (8/5/64 through 5/7/75)

¶ An estimated 3.1 million veterans served in the Southeast Asia Theater (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, flight crews based in Thailand, and sailors in the South China Sea)

¶ An estimated 2.6 million personnel served within the borders of South Vietnam

AGENT ORANGE

Agent Orange was a herbicide used in Vietnam to defoliate trees and remove cover for the enemy. Agent Orange spraying missions were conducted in Vietnam between January 1965 and April 1970. Shipped in orange-striped barrels, Agent Orange was a reddish-brown liquid containing two herbicides: 2,4,5-trichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4,5-T) and 2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4-D). One of the herbicides -- 2,4,5-T -- was contaminated in the manufacturing process with 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin, also known as TCDD or, more commonly, dioxin.

Various chemical herbicides were sprayed in Vietnam at different times -- during different years as well as different seasons because of the variety of vegetation and environmental conditions.

The history of herbicides for military use dates to World War II. During the early part of the war, interest arose in chemicals that could be used for crop destruction. Two chemicals were developed as a result of those early efforts -- 2,4,D and 2,4,5-T. Although neither chemical was used in World War II, the value of their use in weed and brush control programs was recognized, and both chemicals have been used widely throughout the world since the 1940s by farmers, foresters and homeowners.

VA RESPONSE TO CONCERNS ABOUT AGENT ORANGE

The Department of Veterans Affairs has been involved in the search for answers about Agent Orange since 1978:

¶ VA developed the Agent Orange Registry and Examination Program in 1978 to identify Vietnam veterans who are concerned about Agent Orange exposure. As of June 30, 1993, 226,422 Vietnam veterans have been provided examinations under the Registry Program. VA maintains a computerized registry of data from these examinations.

¶ Public Law 97-72, signed in November 1981, authorized VA to provide free medical treatment, on a priority basis, to veterans for health problems that may be related to Agent Orange exposure. VA presumes that veterans who served within the borders of Vietnam were exposed to Agent Orange.

¶ VA's Advisory Committee on Health-Related Effects of Herbicides was established in 1979 to resolve issues surrounding the possible health effects of herbicides on Vietnam veterans. VA also established the Advisory Committee on Environmental Hazards, consisting of non-VA experts in dioxin and radiation exposure as well as several lay members, to advise the Secretary on the results of Agent Orange-related research, and regulatory, administrative and legislative initiatives. With passage of Public Law 102-4, which mandated the National Academy of Sciences study, the committee has not been reviewing dioxin-related studies.

¶ VA has conducted and published numerous studies on the health of Vietnam veterans, associated either with herbicide exposure or the Vietnam experience. Six other studies are in varying stages of completion.

¶ The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) conducted a study for the Department of Veterans Affairs, at the direction of Congress, to review and evaluate available scientific literature on the association between various diseases and herbicide exposure. NAS reviewed more than 6,000 abstracts of scientific or medical articles and conducted detailed analysis of 230 epidemiologic studies. NAS determined that sufficient evidence exists of an association between herbicide exposure and soft-tissue, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, Hodgkin's disease, chloracne and porphyria cutanea tarda (a liver disorder).

¶ Prior to the completion of the NAS study, VA had already recognized soft-tissue sarcoma, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and chloracne as being linked to Agent Orange exposure or Vietnam service, and has been paying compensation to veterans for these conditions.

¶ Based on the results of the NAS study, VA is adding Hodgkin's disease and porphyria cutanea tarda to the list of diseases VA recognizes as being linked to exposure to Agent Orange and other herbicides.

¶ VA will be developing regulations on Hodgkin's disease and porphyria cutanea tarda. The Agent Orange Act (Public Law 102-4), which mandated the \$995,000 NAS study, gives VA until the latter part of February 1994 to publish final regulations. At that time, VA can begin awarding disability compensation to veterans who have these conditions.

¶ As of July 13, 1993, 40,097 Agent Orange-related claims had been filed with VA. This figure includes claims for disability compensation and death claims. Compensation has been paid in 553 cases, although not all related to Agent Orange exposure. Some 29,000 claims are pending, due to the provisions of a lawsuit settlement and Public Law 102-4.
