WASHINGTON POST - 31 OCTOBER 1969 P-2

New Curb Won't Affect Viet Defoliation

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New White House restrictions on the use of a powerful herbicide will not affect its military usefulness in Vietnam, the Defense Department said yesterday.

The Pentagon statement said no change would be made in policy governing military use of the defoliant 2 4, 5-T because the Defense Department feels its present policy conforms to the new presidential directive.

But a Pentagon spokesman's explanation of the policy, read at a morning press briefing, differed markedly from the written version given reporters later.

When the written statement was distributed, reporters were told not to use the spokesman's comment that the defoliant, which has been found "probably dangerous" in a federal study, is used against enemy "training and regroupment centers".

Statement Deleted

The statement was expunged after a reporter asked how use against such centers conformed to the Defense Department's stated policy of prohibiting its use in "populated areas."

The defoliant is also used, the Pentagon said, along roads, railroads and canals to remove foliage that could provide cover for ambushes.

The compound is used in the defoliant mixture called Orange—a 50-50 mix of 2, 4, 5-T and 2, 4-D, a more commonly used herbicide which a study for the National Cancer Institute has labeled "potentially dangerous but needing further study."

White House science adviser Lee A. DuBridge announced Wednesday that use of 2, 4, 5-T by the Defense and Agriculture Departments would be sharply restricted and that the Department of Health, Education and Welfare would prepare food residue tolerance limits.

In recent months, accounts in South Vietnamese newspapers have attempted to link the birth of malformed babies to the U.S. defoliation program.

Defoliation Log

According to Pentagon records, U.S. forces defoliated 1.5 million acres (about 2325 square miles) in 1967, 1.3 million acres in 1968 and 356,481 acres in the first three months of this year. The entire land area of South Vietnam is 65,000 square miles, but the Pentagon said the annual acreage totals include resprayings.

"The policy of the Department of Defense has always been to use 'Orange' in remote areas away from the population," the Pentagon said. "This policy is being reiterated and emphasized; additional precautions are being taken to insure that 'Orange' is not used in populated areas.

"In terms of both offensive and defensive action, defoliation has reduced the number of men and the amount of equipment required for allied combat missions . . . and most importantly, helped save the lives of many Vietnamese and allied personnel. Each defoliation operation is approved by the government of Veitnam and the U.S. embassy."