

U.S. Government Admits It Poisoned Soldiers with Agent Orange After Decades of Denial

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At long last, following years of delay, the U.S. government has finally admitted that it poisoned its own troops in Vietnam decades ago through the mass use of the herbicide known as “Agent Orange.”

In recent days, federal officials agreed to provide millions of dollars in disability benefits to at least 2,100 Air Force reservists and active duty forces that were exposed to Agent Orange on airplanes used to spread it during the war.

NBC News reported:

The new federal rule, approved by the White House Office of Management and Budget, takes effect [June 26]. It adds to an Agent Orange-related caseload that already makes up 1 out of 6 disability checks issued by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The expected cost over 10 years is \$47.5 million, with separate health care coverage adding to the price tag.

Herbicide used to defoliate jungle hideouts and destroy crops

“Opening up eligibility for this deserving group of Air Force veterans and reservists is the right thing to do,” VA Secretary Bob McDonald said in a statement, adding that he would announce the decision in private meetings with veterans’ groups in the coming weeks.

As noted by the non-partisan Aspen Institute in Washington, D.C., the herbicide was a mixture used by the military to defoliate large swaths of Vietnamese jungle as a way of exposing North Vietnamese and Viet Cong troops that were using the jungle as cover to move men and material into South Vietnam. It was part of a color-coded herbicide campaign that also aimed to deprive the enemy of food by destroying crops.

The mixture, which was used until the early 1970s, contained a chemical contaminant known as dioxin. Even though its use ended more than 40 years ago, the dioxin contaminant continues to have a harmful effect today. As many Vietnam vets know, dioxin has been linked to cancers, birth defects, diabetes and other ailments and disabilities.

“The Red Cross estimates that three million Vietnamese have been affected by dioxin, including at least 150,000 children born with serious birth defects,” said the institute on its [web page](#). “Millions of Americans and Vietnamese are still affected, directly and

indirectly, by the wartime U.S. spraying of Agent Orange and other herbicides over southern and central Vietnam.”

The new federal rule will apply to an expanded number of Air Force and other military personnel who either flew on or worked on C-123 aircraft from 1969 to 1986 and are thought to have been exposed to Agent Orange residue. Those planes were used to distribute millions of gallons of the chemical herbicide during the war, which was waged in various stages between 1955-1975.

Many more could qualify for compensation

According to an Institute of Medicine study that was released in January, some C-123 reservists stationed in Ohio, Pennsylvania and Massachusetts were exposed to the herbicides resident in the planes and became higher risks for health problems as a result.

Following a review of military records, the VA said it was able to determine that C-123 pilots, mechanics and medical personnel who served at an additional seven locations around the U.S. and abroad might also have been affected by exposure. These locations include Florida, Virginia, Arizona, Taiwan, Panama, South Korea and the Philippines, *NBC News* reported.

The former military personnel affected by the new rule will become eligible to receive disability assistance including survivor benefits and medical care within the VA system. Vets will have to show that they worked on contaminated planes and then later developed one of 14 medical conditions such as prostate cancer, leukemia and others that the VA has determined are linked to Agent Orange exposure.

The VA said that affected veterans could start submitting applications for benefits right away, noting that it would process them as soon as the rule is formally issued.

Sources:

<http://theantimedia.org>

<http://www.nbcnews.com>

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