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Agent Orange Residue on Post-Vietnam War Airplanes

Some Veterans who were crew members on C-123 Provider aircraft, formerly used to spray Agent Orange during the Vietnam War, have raised health concerns about exposure to residual amounts of herbicides on the plane surfaces.

VA's Office of Public Health thoroughly reviewed [all available scientific information](#) regarding the exposure potential. We concluded that the potential of exposure for the post-Vietnam crews that flew or maintained these planes was extremely low and therefore, the risk of long-term health effects is **minimal**.

Testing for Agent Orange residue on planes used in Vietnam

The U.S. Air Force (USAF) collected and analyzed numerous samples from C-123 aircraft to test for Agent Orange. USAF's [recent risk assessment report](#) (April 27, 2012) (2.3 MB, PDF) found that potential exposures to Agent Orange in C-123 planes used after the Vietnam War **were unlikely to have put aircrew or passengers at risk** for future health problems. The report's three conclusions:

1. There was not enough information and data to conclude how much **individual persons** would have been exposed to Agent Orange.
2. It is expected that exposure to Agent Orange in these aircraft after the Vietnam War was **lower than exposure** during the spraying missions in Vietnam.
3. Potential Agent Orange exposures were **unlikely to have exceeded standards** set by regulators or to have put people at risk for future health problems.

How Veterans may have been exposed

During the Vietnam War, the U.S. Air Force used C-123 aircraft to spray Agent Orange to clear jungles that provided enemy cover in Vietnam. At the end of the spraying campaign in 1971, the remaining C-123 planes were reassigned to reserve units in the U.S. for routine cargo and medical evacuation missions spanning the next 10 years.

Crew members aboard one of these post-Vietnam C-123 planes reported smelling strong odors, which raised concerns about Agent Orange exposure – but Agent Orange is odorless. These odors may have come from various chemicals associated with aircraft.

Health effects of Agent Orange residue

The health effects of exposure to Agent Orange residue on airplanes **differ from direct contact** with liquid Agent Orange. In liquid or spray form, Agent Orange can enter the body through inhalation or ingestion (such as hand-to-mouth contact or getting into food). But in the dry form – for example, adhered to a surface – Agent Orange residue cannot be inhaled or absorbed through the skin, and would be difficult to ingest.

The potential for health effects depends on the amount of Agent Orange present, as well as its ability to enter the body. After reviewing [available scientific reports](#), VA has concluded that the exposure potential in these planes was **extremely low** and therefore, the risk of long-term health effects is minimal. Even if crew exposure did occur, it is unlikely that sufficient amounts of dried Agent Orange residue could have entered the body to have caused harm.

Research studies on Agent Orange

Research on the health effects of Agent Orange has been extensive and it continues. Diverse populations have been studied, including herbicide sprayers and manufacturers, other Vietnam-era Veterans, and those exposed during industrial accidents. This information **helps us to determine what potential health effects** may be related to different levels of exposure.

Find out more about [research on health effects of Agent Orange](#).

VA benefits

If you have health concerns about Agent Orange, talk to your health care provider or [local VA Environmental Health Coordinator](#).

Veterans not enrolled in the VA health care system, [find out if you qualify for VA health care](#).

Although the risk of long-term health problems from exposure to Agent Orange residue on post-Vietnam C-123 airplanes is minimal, Veterans who believe they have exposure-related health problems may file a claim for [disability compensation](#). These claims will be decided on a case-by-case basis.