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More Agent Orange Health Problems Recognized In Vietnam Veterans

Posted by Jane Akre

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Operation Ranch Hand, Courtesy U.S. govt

Agent Orange's Aftermath

It has not been a timely decision.

40 years after the defoliant, Agent Orange was used in the Vietnam War, the Department of Veterans Affairs plans to add a group of three ailments to a list of diseases presumptively caused by exposure to the herbicide.

That means about 200,000 veterans may be able to seek benefits and disability coverage instead of the lengthy application, rejection, and prolonged appeals many have been forced to undergo.

While the new policy could apply to some 2.1 million Vietnam veterans, those in the Navy in deep-water ships will not be included.

Veterans can thank Eric Shinseki, secretary of veteran's affairs and himself a Vietnam veteran.

His decision is a victory for groups such as Vietnam Veterans of America, which the [New York Times](#) reports has been pushing the department to add Parkinson's disease, ischemic heart condition, and hairy-cell leukemia to a list of Agent Orange-caused maladies.

Ischemic heart disease causes irregular heartbeats and a deterioration of the heart muscle when blood flow is restricted to the heart. Parkinson's is associated with a loss of dopamine, a brain chemical that allows for normal movement and Hairy-cell leukemia is a rare slow-growing cancer.

The U.S. already recognizes more than a dozen conditions that may have come from military exposure to Agent Orange. They include Hodgkin's disease, prostate cancer, Type 2 diabetes, spina bifida in children conceived by exposed veterans, chloracne, and ALS, among others.

LEARN MORE

- Institute of Medicine Report – "Veterans and Agent Orange" July 2009
- Vietnam Veterans of America – Statement by John Rowan
- - More on Veterans Health issues
- Department of Veterans Affairs – Agent Orange

IMAGE SOURCE: Wikimedia Commons/ Operation Ranch Hand cropdusting/ author: U.S. government

Mr. Shinseki's decision follows the release of an [Institute of Medicine report](#) in July that found "limited or suggestive evidence" of an association between Agent Orange and these diseases. It also found "sufficient evidence" of an association between herbicides and hairy-cell leukemia though it stopped short of saying the findings represent "a firm conclusion."

Critics say that some diseases linked to Agent Orange could just as likely come from the aging process. The youngest Vietnam veterans are now in their late 50s.

Agent Orange was the most common herbicide used in Vietnam to destroy crops and clear the jungle canopy to better see the enemy. Military planes released the chemical during Operation Ranch Hand from 1962 to 1971.

It contains one of the most toxic forms of dioxin, which has been linked to cancers. It was named because of an orange-colored bank painted on the drums that stored it.

"Secretary Shinseki, who served with distinction in Vietnam, has taken significant strides toward 'doing the right thing' by the veterans with whom he fought some 40 years ago," said John Rowan, National President of Vietnam Veterans of America [in a statement](#). #

Read more: <http://www.injuryboard.com/national-news/more-agent-orange-health-problems-recognized-in-vietnam-veterans.aspx?googleid=272654#ixzz0hl6xhw8A>

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