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NEWS

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MEDIA ADVISORY

FOR RELEASE:

AFTER PRESS CONFERENCE
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DORAL HOTEL

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Media Headquarters during meeting:
April 28 - May 3, 1985
Miramar Room, Doral Hotel, Miami Beach
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DIOXIN CONTAMINATION SUBJECT OF THREE-DAY SYMPOSIUM
AT CHEMISTS' MEETING

MIAMI--"Agent Orange," the herbicide sprayed by U.S. forces in South Vietnam some 15 years ago, "very probably" is still evident in the inhabitants, according to a physician specializing in preventive medicine.

Dr. Arnold Schecter of the State University of New York Upstate Medical Center at Binghamton will discuss this and other findings based on his recent visit to Vietnam at an American Chemical Society meeting here and in Miami Beach, April 28 - May 3. Working with doctors at hospitals in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon), he obtained samples of fat from living and recently deceased patients and brought them back to the U.S. for analysis.

New "extremely accurate" tests applied to these samples showed almost negligible dioxin levels in the Hanoi patients and much higher levels in those from Saigon in the south, he says. These tests are far more reliable than physical exams and oral histories used in earlier studies to determine exposure to dioxins in individuals, he contends.

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U.S. veterans who were in Vietnam during the spraying also show high levels of TCDD, one of the dioxin components of Agent Orange, according to Dr. Schechter's colleague Dr. Michael Gross of the University of Nebraska.

Dr. Schechter and colleague Dr. John J. Ryan of Canada's Health Protection Branch in Ottawa will report on tests made on fatty tissues from more than 100 U.S. and Canadian citizens, including both Vietnam veterans and non-exposed persons. "Surprisingly high" levels of dioxins were found in virtually everyone studied, they note. This finding, according to Dr. Schechter, points up a problem with some epidemiological studies made to date; the "controls" used probably had relatively high levels of dioxins themselves. Accordingly, the estimates of dioxin dosage may not have been accurate.

Dr. Ryan will report on studies of dioxin distribution in various body tissues, including fat. He has found that dioxins concentrate mainly in abdominal and subcutaneous fat. Thus, fat samples are the best basis for determining dioxin levels and exposure in humans, he concludes.

Drs. Schechter and Ryan will present papers on their work Wednesday morning, May 1, during a three-and-a-half-day symposium on dioxins and related chemicals in the environment. The symposium will be held in the Whitehall Room of the Omni International Hotel here, beginning Monday morning, April 29, at 9 o'clock.

A press conference set for 2:30 p.m. Tuesday, April 30, in the Regency Conference Room of the Doral Hotel in Miami Beach will feature Drs. Schecter and Ryan, and Dr. Alvin L. Young of the White House Office of Science and Technology. Dr. Young, who is keynote speaker for the symposium, will talk about public concerns and national science policy regarding dioxins. He will summarize government-initiated long-range research on the chemistry, toxicology, environmental fate, and human risks of the dioxins, and touch on the dioxin-related evacuations of Love Canal, N.Y., Times Beach, Mo., and Seveso, Italy.

Other reports of special public interest from the symposium include one on the possible application of clay-based sorbents to the removal of the dioxins TCDD and OCDD from industrial wastewaters. A common, inexpensive clay can be treated to become an efficient absorbent for dioxins and other contaminants, and can be recycled, according to Dr. Keeran R. Srinivasan of the University of Michigan. He will report at 10:55 a.m. Tuesday, April 30.

In the same morning session, Dr. Robert D. Kleopfer of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will describe the destruction of dioxin-containing wastes in a mobile incineration system. EPA has constructed a rotary-kiln system for field use to destroy hazardous organic substances collected from cleanup operations, he reports.

Two papers in Tuesday afternoon's session will look at dioxin pollution of ambient air from municipal and other waste incinerators in Italy, and Dr. Gustavo Umberto Fortunati of Milan will talk Tuesday morning about lessons learned from the Seveso incident, including advances in reclamation and disposal techniques.

Dioxin residues in fish and other foods is the topic of a paper Monday morning by Dr. David Firestone of the U.S. Food & Drug Administration in Washington, D.C. He will report on studies of fish, particularly in the Saginaw Bay, Mich., area but including Arkansas and Louisiana, and of beef, pork, chicken, eggs, and milk. Reduced levels of TCDD were found in fish in 1983 compared with 1979, and low levels of other dioxins found in animal-derived foods appeared to be associated with widespread use of pentachlorophenol, a herbicide used in agriculture and industry, he reports.

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