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DIOXIN-A CASE STUDY; REPORT FROM THE OFFICE OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY POLICY.

A. L. Young, Office of Science and Technology Policy, Executive Office of the President, Washington, D.C. 20506

The highly toxic chemical 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin (TCDD or dioxin) is a contaminant of products made from trichlorophenol and from low temperature incineration of wastes containing chlorinated precursors. Dioxin is at the center of controversies over (1) the use of Agent Orange in Vietnam and the health of veterans, (2) the use of 2,4,5-T herbicide in Agriculture, and (3) the development of technology for the incineration of muncipal and industrial wastes. It has been associated with the evacuation of human populations in Seveso, Italy; Times Beach, Missouri; and Love Canal, New York. The United States Government has initiated an extensive long-term research program to evaluate the impact of dioxin on human health. This program encompasses scientific resources from ten federal agencies. Risk assessments on dioxin are predicated on laboratory animal toxicologic data and on estimated bioavailability, but the reality of actual human exposure suggests that these assessments are too conservative. Moreover, questions remain as to whether science alone can resolve an issue that has attracted enormous societal interest.