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Description Notes Announces that an updated report from the Agent Orange Working Group was forwarded to the Cabinet Council on Domestic Policy.

HHS NEWS

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
DRAFT

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Dixon Arnett, deputy under secretary for intergovernmental affairs, today forwarded to the Cabinet Council on Domestic Policy an updated report from the Agent Orange Working Group which he chairs, suggesting no new major studies are needed on the subject until evaluations have been done on those already completed or continuing through 1987 at a cost of more than \$150 million.

Terming results of the studies thus far as "reassuring," Arnett said. "Completed studies show no increase in birth defects among children of Vietnam veterans or higher mortality due to Agent Orange exposure.

"However, careful and intensive epidemiological studies in other areas are going on and we must await their findings."

The science panel formed by the AOWG says in the report that the numerous research projects completed or already underway are the ones it considers both essential and feasible.

It recommends "that any additional major research efforts involving Vietnam veterans' exposure to Agent Orange should await evaluation of the results of studies which are currently in progress."

Created in 1979 as a small interagency work group, the AOWG was enlarged and elevated to cabinet council status in July 1981 by President Reagan to show his concern over the fears of Vietnam veterans that they may suffer ill effects from exposure to phenoxy acid herbicides, principally Agent Orange. The herbicides were sprayed to defoliate dense jungle areas from which enemy troops operated.

Veterans groups have maintained they were endangered by an increase in cancers and liver disorders, and expressed fears that their children might be born with defects. They called for scientific research, compensation and treatment.

In forwarding the new AOWG report to the Cabinet Council on Domestic Policy, Arnett said, "The president's promise to support any research necessary to learn whether Vietnam veterans as a group are suffering any chronic health effects not present in a comparable population that did not serve in Vietnam, will be kept."

Led by HHS, 12 federal departments or independent agencies are represented on the Agent Orange Working Group. It sets priorities, coordinates and oversees federal research into the possibility of long-term adverse health effects resulting from exposure to the herbicides used in Vietnam.

The science panel reports that the departments of Health and Human Services, Defense and Agriculture; the Environmental Protection Agency; and the Veterans Administration are conducting ongoing studies with the other AOWG members providing advice and guidance.

The others are the Department of State; Department of Labor; ACTION; the White House Offices of Policy Development, Science and Technology Policy; Office of Management and Budget; Council of Economic Advisors; and the Congressional Office of Technology Assessment, the latter as an observer.

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