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Description Notes

The Cabinet Council Agent Orange Working Group established by President Reagan had its genesis in the Interagency Work Group (IWG) to study the possible long-term effects of phenoxy herbicides and contaminants. The IWG had been chartered by the White House on December 11, 1979. 1/ Its mission was to monitor, coordinate and set priorities among Federal Government research activities, to design a research agenda, and to organize the means to assure that the research agenda are carried out.

In response to the concerns of veterans' groups that exposure to herbicides in Vietnam could be presenting health problems, President Reagan on July 17, 1981 expanded the membership of the IWG, renamed it the Agent Orange Working Group (AOWG) and raised its status to Cabinet Council working group level. 2/ The IWG's mandate was reaffirmed with stated emphasis on research relating to Agent Orange exposure. 3/

In addition, the AOWG was charged with guiding the Congressionally mandated epidemiological study of Vietnam Veterans exposed to Agent Orange. 4/ The Congress in authorizing this study directed the President to assure that the study be fully coordinated with other on-going or future studies. 5/

The legislative history of the Act relative to this presidential responsibility states: "The Committees also

1/ Memorandum for Secretary of Defense, Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, Administrator of Veterans Affairs from Stuart E. Eizenstat, Assistant to the President for Domestic Affairs and Policy, Subject: Interagency Group to Study the Possible Long-Term Health Effects of Phenoxy Herbicides and Contaminants, December 11, 1979.

2/ Memorandum for Secretary Richard Schweiker, Chairman Pro-Tem, Cabinet Council on Human Resources from Robert Carleson, Executive Secretary of Human Resources Cabinet Council, Subject: Agent Orange Working Group, July 17, 1981.

3/ Memorandum for Secretary of Defense, et al from Secretary Richard Schweiker, Chairman Pro-Tem, Cabinet Council on Human Resources, Subject: Agent Orange Working Group, August 21, 1981.

4/ Veterans Health Programs Extension and Improvement Act of 1979, Sec. 307(a), 93 Stat. 1097, P.L. 96-151.

5/ Ibid., Sec. 307(c), 38 U.S.C. 219 note.

stress the importance of the provision directing the President to assure (preferably through an interagency task force) that the mandated study be fully coordinated with on-going or future governmental studies" 6/

The Act was later amended to authorize an expansion of the scope of the epidemiological study to include an evaluation of the adverse health effects which may have occurred as a result of other factors that may have been present in Vietnam. 7/ The amendment did not disturb the direction given to the president regarding coordination of the study nor was the delegation of this presidential responsibility to the AOWG affected. Consequently, the AOWG is charged, in this one instance only, to oversee and coordinate the Vietnam Experience component of the Congressionally authorized study even though the study component is not concerned with the health effects of exposure to Agent Orange.

6/ 125 Cong. Rec. 34992, December 6, 1979.

7/ Veterans' Health Care, Training, and Small Business Loan Act of 1981, Sec. 401, 95 Stat. 1061, P.L. 97-62, 38 U.S.C. 219 note.