

Agent Orange Review

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Information for Veterans Who Served in Vietnam

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Principi Acts on Agent Orange; VA to Open Registry to Veterans Exposed to Agent Orange Outside Vietnam/Korea

When Anthony J. Principi was confirmed as Secretary of Veterans Affairs on Jan. 23, 2001, he promised action in many areas. Two months later, Secretary Principi took action by expanding the Agent Orange Registry, originally established in 1978 for Vietnam veterans concerned about Agent Orange.

Secretary Principi directed Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) personnel to open the Agent Orange Registry Health Examination program to any U.S. veteran who is concerned about possible health effects from exposure to Agent Orange during active duty. Until last year, the Registry was limited to Vietnam veterans who served in Vietnam. More than 300,000 Vietnam veterans have participated in the program.

On September 5, 2000, that restriction was modified to allow Vietnam era veterans who served in Korea during 1968-69, to receive the examination. Small quantities of Agent Orange were used by Korean troops under the supervision of U.S. troops during that time period.

Responding to an inquiry from Congressman Lane Evans, Ranking Democratic Member, House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, regarding Registry examination eligibility for veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange at Fort Drum, NY, Secretary Principi wrote, "I believe that it is feasible to include Fort Drum veterans in the Registry."

Noting the change in policy toward veterans who served in Korea, Principi recognized "that there may be other instances where U.S. servicemembers may have been exposed to Agent Orange or related herbicides containing dioxin contaminants, including certain veterans who served at Fort Drum, as well as others exposed during its manufacture, testing or transport."

Principi wrote, in recognition of the concerns raised about this matter, "I am directing my staff to expand the Agent Orange Registry to offer such examinations to any U.S. veteran who is concerned about possible health effects from exposure to Agent Orange during active duty."

Principi, a Vietnam veteran, noted that under current VA's regulations, whenever it can be established that a veteran was exposed to certain herbicide agents during military service, whether at Fort Drum or anywhere else, that veteran qualifies for a presumption of service connection for any disease that VA recognizes as being associated with such exposure. He wrote, "I have asked the Under Secretary for Benefits to share with each of the Veterans Service Centers the information that the Department of the Army has supplied regarding the testing of herbicides at Fort Drum, so that those facts need not be proven by claimants who served there."

IOM Releases Fifth Agent Orange Report; No Additional Conditions in Veterans Linked to Herbicides; Suggests Association with One Type of Leukemia in Children

On April 19, 2001, the National Academy of Sciences' Institute of Medicine (IOM) released the fifth in a series of reports entitled *Veterans and Agent Orange*. The latest report found little change from the earlier IOM publications. The initial report was released in 1993, with updates in 1996 and 1999 (identified by IOM as Update 1998), and a special review of diabetes last year.

In the current report, subtitled Update 2000, the IOM, a highly respected, independent, non-governmental scientific review organization working for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), evaluated the body of scientific evidence to determine what health problems may be associated with exposure to Agent Orange and other herbicides used in Vietnam.

While the recent update found no new link between Agent Orange exposure and any health problem not previously identified, IOM indicated that new evidence "supports the possibility of an association" between herbicides and a rare childhood leukemia, known as acute myelogenous leukemia (AML). This condition is a rapidly spreading form of leukemia that originates in certain bone marrow cells. AML accounts for about eight percent of all childhood cancers. The more common form of childhood leukemia, acute lymphocytic leukemia (ALL) was not associated with Agent Orange by the IOM report. Little is known about what causes such diseases in children, how parents' chemical exposures affect their children, or potential environmental risk factors for children.