

Veterans and Agent Orange: Update 1998 Findings of a U.S. National Academy of Sciences Study

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Introduction

Because of continuing uncertainty about the long-term health effects of exposure to herbicides used in Vietnam, the U.S. Congress passed Public Law 102-4, the "Agent Orange Act of 1991." This legislation directed the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to request the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) to conduct a comprehensive review and evaluation of scientific and medical information regarding the health effects of exposure to Agent Orange, other herbicides used in Vietnam, and the various chemical components of these herbicides, including dioxin. A committee convened by the Institute of Medicine (IOM) of the NAS conducted this review and in 1994 published a comprehensive report, entitled *Veterans and Agent Orange: Health Effects of Herbicides Used in Vietnam* (henceforth called *VAO*) [1].

Public Law 102-4 also called for the NAS to conduct subsequent reviews at least every two years for a period of ten years from the date of the first report. The NAS was instructed to conduct a comprehensive review of the evidence that has become available since the previous IOM committee report; and reassess its determinations and estimates of statistical association, risk, and biological plausibility. Upon completion of *VAO*, a successor committee was formed which produced *Veterans and Agent Orange: Update 1996 (Update 1996)* [2]. This paper briefly discusses the second updated review and evaluation, ...*Update 1998*, which was released in the summer of 1998 [3].

Background

This IOM report is the second updated review and evaluation of the newly published scientific evidence regarding associations between diseases and exposure to dioxin and other chemical compounds in herbicides used in Vietnam. For each disease, the IOM was asked to determine, to the extent that available data permitted meaningful determinations: 1) whether a statistical association with herbicide exposure exists, taking into account the strength of the scientific evidence and the appropriateness of the statistical

and epidemiological methods used to detect the association; 2) the increased risk of the disease among those exposed to herbicides during Vietnam service; and 3) whether there is a plausible biological mechanism or other evidence of a causal relationship between herbicide exposure and the disease.

Discussion

[This report was under peer review at the deadline for submission of abstracts and the results were not available for public release. A presentation of the results will be made at the Dioxin '98 Symposium.]

Acknowledgments

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References

1. Institute of Medicine. *Veterans and Agent Orange: Health Effects of Herbicides Used in Vietnam* National Academy of Sciences, National Academy Press, 1994; ISBN 0-309-04887-7.
2. Institute of Medicine. *Veterans and Agent Orange: Update 1996* National Academy of Sciences, National Academy Press, 1996; ISBN 0-309-05487-7.
3. Institute of Medicine. *Veterans and Agent Orange: Update 1998* National Academy of Sciences, National Academy Press, 1998; ISBN not yet assigned.