

The Role Of Scientific Studies In Addressing the Legacy Of Agent Orange

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Over the last decade the U.S. and Vietnam have made remarkable progress in jointly addressing the legacy of Agent Orange through remediation of dioxin contaminated sites and assistance to Vietnamese with disabilities regardless of cause [1]. This progress is grounded in three studies. Beginning in the late 1990s Hatfield Consultants and the Vietnamese Ministry of Health's 10-80 Committee [2] developed the dioxin hotspot hypothesis which focused attention on point sources of contamination at former American airbases. Stellman *et al.*'s 2003 review [3] of spraying records established quantities of spray materials and levels of contamination which allowed the areas that had been most heavily sprayed to be identified [4]. The third study, reported here, utilizes data from the 2009 census and disability surveys in Danang, Vietnam, to characterize people with disabilities associated with dioxin exposure.

The analysis of the Danang study focuses on the disabilities that begin with birth defects linked to indirect exposure to dioxin, rather than on the health consequences for those who were directly exposed [5]. It hypothesizes that people in this group have disabilities which distinguish them from the population of all Vietnamese with disabilities. The study found that (1) Mobility impairments and mental disabilities afflict nearly 90 percent (87.3%) of those persons identified as Agent Orange victims, whereas these kinds of disabilities affect just under 40 percent of all Vietnamese with disabilities and (2) Disability makes life difficult to very difficult, suggesting severe and profound disability, for 60 percent of Agent Orange victims, compared with 40 percent of all Vietnamese with disabilities.

The results of all three studies are now embedded in U.S. law which guides American funding for Agent Orange in Vietnam: "...[T]he funds appropriated by this Act...shall be made available for activities related to the remediation of dioxin contaminated sites in Vietnam and...for health and disability programs in areas sprayed with Agent Orange and otherwise contaminated with dioxin, to assist individuals with severe upper or lower body mobility impairment and/or cognitive or developmental disabilities." [6] The U.S. Congress has appropriated \$201.2 million for these purposes to date [7].

References

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