

TODAY'S HEADLINES

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ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION

DIOXIN IN VIETNAM REMAIN HIGH

Analyses show much more TCDD sprayed than earlier estimates

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The amounts of 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-*p*-dioxin (TCDD) contaminant in agent orange and other herbicides sprayed during the Vietnam War are up to four times greater than previous estimates, according to data presented by researchers at a briefing last week in Washington, D.C. Measurements also show that levels of TCDD in Vietnam's soil and in the blood and food of residents there remain high.

Jeanne Mager Stellman, a chemist at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, and colleagues unearthed huge amounts of data and compiled a computer database of herbicide spraying in Vietnam. The data include flight paths, the amount and type of agents delivered, troop and local population locations, and land features. With such data, the Institute of Medicine said in a recent report, it is possible to perform large-scale epidemiological studies of the link between herbicide spraying and the health of U.S. troops and Vietnamese.

"It is important to realize that agent orange was not the only toxic herbicide used in Vietnam," Stellman said. Another herbicide, agent purple, for instance, was also highly contaminated with TCDD.

The equivalent of about 600 kg of pure TCDD was sprayed and spilled in Vietnam during the war, in contrast to the 170 kg widely reported, according to Wayne Dwernychuk, senior vice president of Hatfield Consultants in Vancouver. His firm has measured extremely high TCDD levels at abandoned U.S. military bases where agent orange and other herbicides were stored and loaded. Soil samples at the Bien Hoa base have levels of up to 1.2 ppm, he said.

Both researchers urged that epidemiological studies be conducted on highly exposed U.S. troops and Vietnamese.

[Top](#)

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