

[Dioxin Exposure - Naval Logistic Support Personnel](#)

23 March 1999  
Mr Ian McLennan  
Registrar  
Repatriation Medical Authority.  
PO Box 1014  
GPO Brisbane Qld 4001

Dear Ian,

During our discussion 20 March 1999, you invited me to write to you regarding the above subject. This correspondence is in response to that invitation.

As I understand it, the recent Vietnam Veterans Health Study has produced higher than expected numbers of reported birth defects in the offspring of the above class of Veteran. I am informed that there is some surprise at these figures, when considering the time spent in the 'areas' by the ships concerned, against that of Army and RAAF personnel based on land.

There is medical opinion to link birth defects with Dioxin. As we are all aware, this substance was widely used in Vietnam as an ingredient in defoliants.

I suggest that personnel who served in HMAS SYDNEY and the escort ships were exposed to Dioxin at higher levels and for longer periods than their colleagues serving ashore. The basis for my suggestion is that they were ingesting the substance during the whole time that their ships were travelling to and from Vung Tau, and, for many years subsequent.

Because ships, engaged in the above deployments, travelled to and from Australia without calling at other ports, there was a great demand on water supplies. The concerned ships were producing water through their evaporator systems during the journeys, and while at anchor in Vung Tau.

There was a direct flow of water into Vung Tau harbour from up-stream, which would have carried Dioxin as a result of direct fall-out from defoliating operations, as well as the chemicals carried into the river and estuaries by way of natural land flow water courses. In addition there was the fallout from defoliating operations around the Vung Tau area. As a result these waters would be higher in the concentration of Dioxin than the isolated rivers and streams inland. This water would have been extracted from Vung Tau harbour and put through the evaporator systems in the various ships. This is where the problem was compounded and the concentrated deposits were transferred to the ships water tanks to be consumed and carried around until the next major refit, at which time a thorough manual cleaning would have been carried out. Even then, it would be my opinion that residue would remain in the tanks for many years, albeit at lesser levels.

The evaporators in the ships boil water under vacuum, this means that water boils at 160 degrees F, and not the normal 212 degrees F. As I understand it, Dioxin is unlikely to be reduced by boiling in this manner, therefore the transfer of the distilled water from the evaporator to the tanks would contain higher concentrations of Dioxin, than the already high levels, that were present when the water was taken aboard. This is because the salt and brine are extracted from the base water supply, and jettisoned, whereas the Dioxin levels would not alter.

I would like to know of any scientific or medical opinion regarding the above, To this end I recommend an inquiry into the ingestion of Dioxin by personnel serving in ships of the Royal Australian navy involved in Troop Transport Operations during, and after, the War in Vietnam, and I request your assistance in arranging same.

Yours sincerely  
Noel Payne.  
National President FESR Association (Australia)  
Veterans' Advocate