

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

April 3, 2017

The Honorable Gene Dodaro  
Comptroller General of the United States  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Comptroller General Dodaro,

During the Vietnam War, the United States used over 11 million gallons of Agent Orange over rural landscapes to defoliate trees and shrubs that provided cover for opposition forces. Agent Orange is an equal mixture of 2,4-dichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4-D) and 2,4,5-trichlorophenoxyacetic acid (2,4,5-T), which contained traces of 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin (TCDD). The dioxin, TCDD, was an unwanted byproduct of production that is of particular concern because EPA and OSHA have classified it as highly toxic and carcinogenic. Dioxin is persistent in the environment and can have a half-life of more than 100 years if buried in soil or deep in the sediment of water bodies. When present in water bodies, dioxin is consumed by mollusks, fish, and waterfowl, thereby entering the human food chain.

Agent Orange has been linked to serious health impacts in veterans and their children. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) currently offers service-connected compensation to veterans for diseases believed to be associated with Agent Orange exposure, including certain cancers, such as Hodgkin's disease and respiratory cancers, as well as other health problems, such as Parkinson's Disease. The VA has also recognized a connection between Agent Orange and spina bifida and other birth defects in the children of Vietnam veterans. In addition, several areas around the United States where Agent Orange was manufactured or stored continue to report unsafe levels of dioxin contamination, leading to a number of related lawsuits. In February 2012, Monsanto Company settled a lawsuit by agreeing to make over \$90 million available to citizens living in Nitro, West Virginia, for medical benefits and remediation services because of dioxin contamination stemming from production of Agent Orange. Several sites with dioxin contamination are listed on the nation's National Priority List (NPL) for hazardous waste cleanup, and according to EPA, cleanup at these sites is currently ongoing.

In addition, questions have been raised about whether the use of Agent Orange was sanctioned at Andersen Air Force Base (AAFB) on Guam during the 1960s and 1970s. While it is widely known that Agent Orange was used by the U.S. military in Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War, the extent that such use or storage was on Guam is unclear. Concerns have been raised about the degree to which Guam was a trans-shipment point for Agent Orange and the degree to which Agent Orange may have been used as a defoliant on Guam. To the extent that either of these activities occurred, it is possible that individuals at AAFB, or elsewhere on the island, could have come into contact with the herbicide or its chemical residues.

Given the severity of the health concerns and the extent of dioxin contamination associated with Agent Orange, we would like GAO to address the following questions:

- What is known about where the federal government stored, transferred, and used Agent Orange or its components, and what is known about related contamination at these locations? In addressing this question, please address what is known about the storage, transfer, and use of Agent Orange on Guam.
- How many known and suspected environmental “hot spots” from dioxin contamination associated with Agent Orange are in the U.S. and its territories?
  - What is known about the current dioxin levels and threats to human health and the environment at these sites?
  - What plans are in place to remediate these sites, and what is the status of these plans?
  - To what extent has the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) completed public health assessments at NPL sites with dioxin contamination and what actions have been taken as a result?
  - How much has the Department of Defense (DoD) spent to date to clean up these sites and what are the projected remaining costs associated with these cleanup efforts?

Thank you for your consideration of this request. Should you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact Jason McMahon at [jason.mcmahon@mail.house.gov](mailto:jason.mcmahon@mail.house.gov) or at (202) 225-1188.

Sincerely,

  
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