Restoring Damaged Ecosystems

U.S. spraying left behind nearly 5 million acres of denuded or heavily defoliated upland and coastal forests in southern Vietnam – about 36 percent of the total mangrove forest area – and damaged some 500,000 acres of rice and other crops. The total affected area is about the size of Massachusetts. It would take centuries to reproduce the ecologically balanced mix of flora and fauna that once thrived there. Four decades later, many ecosystems have not yet recovered.

Soil erosion and landslides have sharply reduced soil nutrients and altered runoff patterns. Invasive grasses of low value have taken hold in many areas. The loss of trees, biological diversity and usable cropland has slowed development and led to economic stagnation, poverty and malnutrition. Animal and bird species have suffered from habitat loss; some are now in danger of extinction.ii

The most heavily sprayed areas were in the Rung Sat Special Zone, along the rivers approaching Saigon, the Ca Mau peninsula south of the Mekong Delta, and the inland forests near the demilitarized zone. Some areas were sprayed more than four times; 34 percent of the regions were sprayed more than once. Areas along the Laos and Cambodia borders were also sprayed. The total area covered included about 24 percent of southern Vietnam.iii

Has the landscape recovered? Only in part. The most severe defoliation was in coastal mangrove forests, where extensive stands of the dominant tree (Rhizophora apiculata) were killed. Shrubs below were heavily defoliated but generally survived. Areas around the 17th parallel former demilitarized zone near the Laotian border remain denuded. Most of the triple-canopy forests were replaced by invasive weeds (villagers call some varieties “American grass”), tussock grass and bamboo. Mangrove regeneration has been slow because of degraded soils, hillside erosion and repeated flooding and fires. Intensive mangrove replanting has occurred in some areas.

What was the impact on area residents? Villagers harvested the dead mangroves for fuel, but many who had depended upon forest crops and hunting lost their livelihoods. In areas where crops were destroyed, barren soils became heavily eroded, losing fertility, and many peasants abandoned their lands. They suffered poverty, unemployment and malnutrition as a result.

Is reforestation possible? Yes, and necessary, because natural regrowth could take more than a century, with unpredictable results. Active replanting with ecologically viable trees and shrubs with economic value will require substantial and sustained long-term investment..iv The Vietnamese government has already demonstrated the promise of several interventions.

The Vietnamese government plan is to reforest half the degraded area over the next several decades, to re-establish ecological balance, preserve and restore biodiversity, help combat global warming, and improve the lives of local people.
• In 2008, a training project in central Quang Tri province educated 91 farmers and 92 farm managers and technicians in habitat restoration and damaged land re-use techniques. Residents of other regions have requested similar courses. Course elements have been used in the Ma Da Forest:
  ▪ Establish a “cover crop” of fast-growing Acacia trees to create shade to protect rain forest tree seedlings from the intense tropical sun.
  ▪ When cover crop trees are tall enough (in about three years), plant seedlings of several indigenous species of forest trees such as Dipterocarp beneath the cover crop.

• In the mountainous A Loi area near Hue, 256 spraying missions denuded 175,000 acres around three former U.S. Special Forces bases. A Vietnamese project has planted “green fences” of thorny honey locust trees (Gleditschia australis) around the worst-contaminated areas of the former A So airbase to prevent further human and animal exposure.
  ▪ In two to five years, the fruit of the trees can be used or sold to produce soaps, shampoo and medicines, providing an income source and paying for the trees’ upkeep.
  ▪ The soft-wood trees have no use as fuel, thrive in stony areas, are hardy against local insects and diseases, and live 50 to 60 years.

• The government began a program in the 1970s to replant ravaged coastal mangrove forests with Rhizophora apicuada seedlings. Some 70,000 hectares (144,000 acres) of forest have been replanted and are now a self-sustaining and profitable source of fuel and wood for construction.
  ▪ Area fisheries and wetland bird colonies that vanished during the war are returning.
  ▪ In the Can Gio district southeast of Ho Chi Minh City, more than 35,000 hectares (77,000 acres) of mangroves were nearly destroyed. Now, 22,000 hectares have been replanted and are growing well enough for Man and the Biosphere/UNESCO to have included the area in its Biosphere Reserves world network in 2000.\(^{\text{vii}}\)

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3 Vo Quy, “Statement...”


6 Boi, *Agent Orange...* powerpoint p. 37
The Health Effects of Agent Orange and Dioxin

Dioxin even in tiny amounts (parts per trillion) is associated with severe health damage that can shorten the lives of people exposed to it, and potentially that of their offspring and future generations.

- The U.S. Institute of Medicine’s July 2009 report cited sufficient evidence of association between exposure to Agent Orange/dioxin and five illnesses: soft-tissue sarcoma, non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, chronic lymphocytic leukemia (including hairy-cell leukemia), Hodgkin’s disease, and chloracne.¹
- The report also found evidence suggesting an association with prostate cancer, multiple myeloma, amyloidosis (abnormal protein deposits), Parkinson’s disease, porphyria cutanea tarda (a blood and skin disorder), ischemic heart disease, hypertension, Type 2 diabetes, peripheral neuropathy, and cancer of the larynx, lung, bronchea or trachea, and spina bifida in exposed people’s offspring.
- In Vietnam, the Vietnamese Red Cross also associates the following with exposure to dioxin: liver cancer; lipid metabolism disorder; reproductive abnormalities and congenital deformities such as cleft lip, cleft palate, club foot, hydrocephalus, neural tube defects, fused digits, muscle malformations and paralysis; and some developmental disabilities.

Why are Agent Orange and Dioxin so dangerous? Dioxin is a persistent organic pollutant that is toxic over many decades, is not water-soluble and does not degrade easily. Clinging to soil particles carried by water runoff from spills or sprayed areas downstream into the sediments of lakes or streams, it is consumed by mollusks, fish and waterfowl, easily entering the human food chain.

- Chemically stable and retained in human fatty tissue, dioxin alters the complex cellular and chemical balances involved in bodily functioning and reproductive processes.
- Its adverse effects can be ameliorated by surgery, medication or rehabilitation therapy in most cases if detected early, but some effects cannot be corrected by any amount of time or money.
- The genetic effects may skip a generation and reappear in third or subsequent generations.

How many people were exposed? Between 2.1 and 4.5 million Vietnamese civilians lived in areas sprayed with dioxin-contaminated herbicides at the time of spraying.¹² The U.S. Veterans Administration presumes that any of the 2.8 million U.S. veterans who had “boots on the ground” in Vietnam from 1962 to 1975 were exposed to dioxin-contaminated herbicides, including Agent Orange.

- These numbers do not include the U.S. civilians or others who traveled through sprayed regions, Vietnamese who worked on bases where herbicides were stored and handled; or Vietnamese who were exposed after the war at “hot spots” of dioxin residue in southern Vietnam.
- The numbers also do not include the millions of North and South Vietnamese and Viet Cong armed forces members who were exposed to spraying during and after their time of military service.

(more)
• The numbers do not include U.S. Navy veterans who served off the Vietnamese coast, those who flew over sprayed areas from carriers or bases outside the country, or veterans or civilians who were in other areas of use, testing or spraying (e.g., Korea, Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Puerto Rico.)
• Many people still live in or near some of the “hot spots,” where their exposure continues.iii

No accurate numbers exist for those who were affected. The Vietnamese Red Cross estimates that up to three million Vietnamese have suffered health effects from dioxin exposure, of whom at least 150,000 are children with birth defects.iv The U.S. government provides health care and compensation on a humanitarian basis to Vietnam veterans suffering from any condition on a list of illnesses associated with Vietnam service. No studies have yet documented the extent of possible Agent Orange/dioxin-related health effects among these 1.4 million people.

**What are standard limits for dioxin exposure?** The World Health Organization recommends a monthly limit of 70 picograms per kilogram of body weight,v or 0.07 ppt [parts per trillion] in blood.
• The general environmental limit in most countries is 1,000 ppt TEQ (toxic equivalent) in soils and 100 ppt in sediment. Most industrialized countries have dioxin concentrations in soils of less than 12 ppt.vi
• The U.S. Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry has determined that levels higher than 1,000 ppt TEQ in soil require intervention, including research, surveillance, health studies, community and physician education, and exposure investigation.vii
• The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is considering reducing these limits to 72 ppt TEQ. This change would significantly increase the potential volume of contaminated soil requiring treatment.

**What Agent Orange/dioxin exposure levels have been found in the Vietnamese?** The highest level recorded was in a person fishing in the lake on the Da Nang airbase, over 1,000 ppt. In comparison, people in industrial nations such as the United States have a baseline of 3-7 ppt of dioxin in their blood.viii

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http://books.nap.edu/openbook.php?record id=12662&page=7

http://www.warlegacies.org/nature01537.pdf

http://www.warlegacies.org/Agent%20Orange/Boi.pdf

iv Fawthrop, Tom, “Vietnam’s War against Agent Orange,” BBC News story, June 14, 2004:  
http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/3798581.stm


http://www.warlegacies.org/Hatfield-Dioxin-Presentation-DC-052809.pdf

viii Hatfield Consultants, “Summary...” slide 27
What Can Be Done to Help the People in Vietnam?

First, the sources of exposure must be detected, evaluated, controlled and eliminated. Then the food supply must be protected through systems for monitoring and dealing with contamination. Health care systems can provide and subsidize comprehensive care for affected individuals, including education, genetic counseling about possible impacts on offspring, training, medications, surgery and rehabilitation, as needed.

Programs reach only a small number of those in need.

• The Vietnamese government provides a monthly stipend of about $17 to more than 200,000 Vietnamese believed affected by the toxic herbicides. ¹ In 2008 alone this totaled $40.8 million.

• The Vietnam Association of Victims of Agent Orange has raised support since 2004 for those affected by Agent Orange and is conducting a survey to identify others affected nationwide.

• The Vietnam Red Cross has raised more than $22 million to assist the ill or disabled.

• With funding from the Ford Foundation and other donors, some rehabilitation, education and other services to the disabled are provided by the War Legacies Project, the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation, the East Meets West Foundation, The Da Nang-Quang Nam Fund, Catholic Relief Services, CHEER Vietnam, Children of Vietnam and Vietnam Assistance for the Handicapped.

• The Ford Foundation, seven other foundations, three European governments, UNICEF and the UN Development Programme have given a total of $23 million for cleanup, health care and other services to Vietnamese affected by Agent Orange/dioxin, including advocacy for more resources.

• The U.S. Congress has allocated $9 million over four years for “hot spot” remediation and health programs. So far, $2 million has been allocated to three U.S. non-governmental organizations for programs to support and care for those with disabilities in Da Nang.

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Resources

Links to all resources listed below can be found at [http://www.warlegacies.org/AgentOrange.htm](http://www.warlegacies.org/AgentOrange.htm).

Films
- **Agent Orange: A Personal Requiem.** Masako Sakata’s story of a Vietnam visit after her husband died from cancer believed to be caused by his exposure to Agent Orange. (2006)
- **Agent Orange: Thirty Years Later.** Written and Directed by John Trinh. Tells the story of several victims of Agent Orange exposed when it was sprayed during the war. (2008, 56 mins.)
- **A Story from the Corner of the Park.** Directed by Tran Van Thuy. The story of a Vietnamese family in Hanoi whose children are believed affected by Agent Orange. (1996, 50 mins.)
- **Battle’s Poison Cloud.** Directed by Cecile Trijssenaar of Tambuti Films. Examines the birth defects issue and recent scientific research, including studies by Hatfield Consultants Ltd. (2003)
- **Da Cam.** A Vietnamese-American, Vu Tran, returns to Vietnam to document the stories of those believed to have been affected by Agent Orange. (2005)
- **The Friendship Village.** Directed by Michelle Mason. Award-winning documentary about international veterans who built a village in Vietnam for disabled children. (2002, 50 mins.)
- **Last Ghost of War.** Directed by Janet Gardner. Vietnamese plaintiffs file a class action suit against chemical companies that produced Agent Orange. (2008)
- **Through Their Eyes.** Directed by Jackee Chang. Black Bag Productions. (2010, 74 mins.)

Books:
- National Academy of Sciences: **Veterans and Agent Orange Update 2008.** Comprehensive evaluation of scientific and medical information on the health effects of exposure to Agent Orange and other herbicides used in Vietnam. 2009. (Also bi-annual updates starting in 1996)
- Wilcox, Fred A.: **Waiting for an Army to Die: The Tragedy of Agent Orange.** Seven Locks Press (October 1989)
- Young, Alvin: **The History, Use, Disposition and Environmental Fate of Agent Orange.** Springer (April 2009). The U.S. Deputy Undersecretary of Defense (Installations and Environment) commissioned this book to document the fate of Agent Orange/dioxin.

Research Reports and Presentations
- Bailey, Charles R.: **Resolving the Legacy of the Vietnam War.** Speech to the American Public Health Association, Nov. 9, 2009

(more)
• Fund for Reconciliation and Development: *Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin in Vietnam - The Expectations*. Conference proceedings, Hanoi, March 16-17, 2006
• Institute of Social Development Studies: *People with Disabilities in Viet Nam: Findings from a Social Survey in Dong Nai, Quang Nam, Da Nang and Thai Binh*. Hanoi. December 2007
• Palmer, M.G.: *The legacy of agent orange: empirical evidence from central Vietnam*. Social Science & Medicine, Elsevier (March 1, 2005)
• U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: list of Agent Orange Test Sites in the United States

**Articles and News Reports**
• Ashwanden, Christie: “Through the Forest, a Clearer View of the Needs of a People,” *The New Yor Times*, Sept. 18, 2007
• HD Net World Report, *Vietnam's Lingering Ghost: Facing the Legacy of Agent Orange*.

**Web sites**
• East Meets West Foundation: [www.eastmeetswest.org](http://www.eastmeetswest.org)
• Ford Foundation Special Initiative on Agent Orange: [www.fordfound.org/about/signature/agentorange](http://www.fordfound.org/about/signature/agentorange)
• Hatfield Group: [www.hatfieldgroup.com/services/contaminantagentorange.aspx](http://www.hatfieldgroup.com/services/contaminantagentorange.aspx)
• U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: [www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/](http://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange/)
• Vietnam Ministry of Natural Resources and the Environment Committee 33: [www.office33.gov.vn](http://www.office33.gov.vn)
• War Legacies Project: [www.warlegacies.org/AgentOrange.htm](http://www.warlegacies.org/AgentOrange.htm)

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Agent Orange Hot Spots: Cleaning Up Dioxin-Contaminated Soils

Agent Orange/dioxin residues in Vietnam can be and are being cleaned up, using well-known and cost-effective methods. Additional resources would allow scale-up and expansion of these best practices to all existing “hot spots.” Dioxin-contaminated herbicides were sprayed over about 5 million acres of upland and mangrove forests and about 500,000 acres of crops -- a total area the size of Massachusetts, about 24 percent of southern Vietnam. Some areas of Laos and Cambodia along the Vietnam border were also sprayed. Dioxin is not water-soluble. It breaks down in sunlight or clings to soil particles and is washed away in rainwater, so little remains in areas that were sprayed by air. However, Hatfield Consultants (Canada) has found “hot spots” of high dioxin concentrations in areas where the dioxin-contaminated herbicides were stored, leaked or spilled. These are mostly on and around former U.S. military installations. Dioxin leached into the soil or was transported by runoff into the sediments of nearby rivers, lakes and ponds.

About Hot Spots: Research continues, but as of September 2009, Hatfield and Vietnamese officials had located 28 dioxin “hot spots,” primarily where the Ranch Hand program was based. The most significant are at the Da Nang, Phu Cat and Bien Hoa airports that were used by the U.S. military.ii Safety standards for dioxin vary from country to country and by substance tested: food, air, water or soil. As most exposure to dioxin is through the food chain, the greatest concern for human exposure is the dioxin level in soil and sediment.

- The general standard in most countries is that dioxin levels must not exceed 1,000 ppt (parts per trillion) TEQ (toxic equivalent) in soil and 100 ppt in sediments. Levels beyond that require immediate remediation. Average dioxin contamination in the soil of industrialized nations is less than 12 ppt.
- In Vietnam, researchers found dioxin levels of up to 365,000 ppt at Da Nang, 185,000 ppt on the Bien Hoa base and 236,000 ppt in former storage areas on the Phu Cat base.iii

Hot Spots Cleanup: The U.S. Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry has determined that dioxin levels higher than 1,000 ppt in soil require intervention, including surveillance, research, health studies, community and physician education, and exposure investigation.iv The first step is to prevent access to contaminated areas by constructing fences and other barriers to protect the local population from further exposure. Second, containment measures such as concrete caps, filtration systems and sediment traps can prevent dioxin from being transported to secondary sites such as ponds and streams, and from there up the food chain to people. Then the isolated soils can be cleaned of dioxin through appropriate technical means.

Dioxin cleanup: The cost of cleanup depends on the severity of the contamination, the type of soil affected and later uses planned for the area. Hatfield Consultants and its Vietnamese counterpart,
Office of Committee 33, estimate that a total of 234,780 cubic meters of soil and sediment need remediation at Bien Hoa, Da Nang and Phu Cat, the worst known sites – enough material to cover a football field nine feet deep. In mid-2009, the remediation cost was estimated at $58.7 million.¹

**Actions by Vietnam and the United States:** In 2003, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency began a $2.4 million project in cooperation with the Vietnamese to investigate the situation at Da Nang, funding U.S. government agencies and their contractors. In 2007, the Joint Advisory Committee of U.S. and Vietnamese agencies began holding yearly meetings. In the same year, Congress allocated $3 million to address remediation of dioxin hotspots in Vietnam and to support public health programs in the surrounding communities.[vi] A second allocation of $3 million was included in the FY2009 Foreign Operations spending bill, and a third allocation of $15 million, substantially increasing U.S. government support, was approved for FY2010. As of January 2010, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the implementing agency, had distributed $2 million to three non-governmental organizations for programs to support those with disabilities in the Da Nang area.[vii] In October 2009, USAID allocated $1.69 million to a U.S. engineering firm to assess dioxin contamination there and design a remediation plan. The remaining funds have not yet been released.[viii] No U.S. funds have gone directly to the Vietnamese, nor have any U.S. funds been spent on reforestation or other environmental remediation.

**NGO Activities:** The lead NGO has been the Ford Foundation, which has provided $11.5 million in grants in Vietnam to test for and contain dioxin-contaminated soils, develop treatments and support centers for Vietnamese who have been exposed, restore landscapes, and educate the U.S. public and policymakers.[ix] Ford has also worked to increase awareness about Agent Orange/dioxin among donors and to encourage new donors such as UNICEF, The Atlantic Philanthropies and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Many U.S. and Vietnamese NGOs have projects that provide services to the disabled in Vietnam.

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⁵ Committee 33 PowerPoint Presentation: “Overcoming...”


⁷ The East Meets West Foundation, Save the Children and Vietnam Assistance for the Handicapped.

⁸ $500,000 is being used to finance a staff person for dioxin issues at the U.S. embassy in Hanoi and for more expert exchanges. If their programs are successful, $1 million more is expected to go to the three NGOs that received the first allocation.

⁹ Bailey, Charles: “Chronology of Key Events 1993 through June 2009.” Ford’s funded work includes research by the Hatfield Consultants, 10-80 committee and Committee 33; policy discussions and public education conducted by the U.S.-Vietnam Dialogue Group on Agent Orange; and mitigation projects by several U.S. and Vietnamese organizations, including the Vietnam Veterans of American Foundation, the East Meets West Foundation, Children of Vietnam and Vietnam Assistance for the Handicapped. Ford has also funded the public education work of the War Legacies Project. For more information go to http://www.fordfound.org/about/signature/agentorange/issue
Agent Orange ‘Hot Spots’ in the United States

Several U.S. communities at or near Agent Orange manufacturing or storage sites continue to report dioxin levels above recommended safety standards.

• These include Dow Chemical sites in Saginaw and Midland MI; a Diamond Shamrock site in Newark Bay NJ; a Monsanto Chemical Co. site in Nitro WV; a testing site in Hilo HI; and military bases where the herbicides were tested or stored, at Gulfport MS, Fort Drum NY, Eglin Air Force Base FL and Fort Detrick MD.

• In October, 1998, a federal court ordered Hercules Inc. and Uniroyal Chemical Ltd. To reimburse the Environmental Protection Agency $102.8 million for its cleanup of the Vertac Superfund site in Jacksonville AK, where Agent Orange was produced and stored.¹

• In 1983, all 2,200 residents of Times Beach MO were relocated due to dioxin contamination from the use of waste oil from a chemical production facility in Verona MO (not related to Agent Orange) to control dust on local roads. The relocation cost $30 million, plus $110 million to incinerate the contaminated soil.²

• The early stages of the Times Beach controversy, along with the 1970s dioxin contamination scandal at Love Canal in Niagara Falls NY (also not related to Agent Orange), led to creation of the Environmental Protection Agency’s Superfund toxic waste cleanup program in 1980.

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Agent Orange and U.S. Veterans

In 2008, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs provided $13.8 billion in compensation to 1,015,410 Vietnam-era veterans. The agency does not relate these service-connected benefit figures directly to Agent Orange/dioxin exposure or to any other possible cause of illness, nor does it provide data on total compensation for the years since the war ended.

Thousands of U.S. veterans returning from Vietnam reported health problems almost immediately and rapidly associated them with Agent Orange/dioxin exposure. Controversy over these assertions began just as fast, and continues now.

Many questions remain:

- Whether (and how to test whether) the illnesses of veterans and their offspring are related to Agent Orange and other herbicide exposure;
- Levels of dioxin present in the chemicals;
- The accuracy of data about veterans’ exposure;
- Levels of corporate, military and government awareness of dioxin’s presence;
- Fixing of responsibility for the contaminant’s presence and liability for its damages;
- Details of research protocols, accuracy of findings and reliability of interpretations; and
- Decisions on who should pay what to whom for which possible courses of remedial action.

This “blame game” has blocked action in both the U.S. and Vietnam, needlessly prolonging the suffering of millions of U.S. veterans and Vietnamese.

The current U.S. government position on Agent Orange/dioxin damage to U.S. veterans:

In the Agent Orange Act of 1991, Congress required the National Academy of Sciences to review periodically all medical and scientific research on the health effects of exposure to Agent Orange/dioxin and other chemicals used during the Vietnam War, and to their individual components. The NAS Institute of Medicine now issues biennial reports called Veterans and Agent Orange. The most recent one was issued in July 2009.

- The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs now allows compensation to anyone who had “boots on the ground” in Vietnam or served on particular U.S. Navy ships offshore from 1962 to 1975 (about 2.8 million people) and suffers from any of these diseases: soft-tissue sarcoma, non-Hodgkins lymphoma, Hodgkin’s disease, chloracne, chronic lymphocytic leukemia, respiratory cancer, prostate cancer, multiple myeloma, amyloidosis, peripheral neuropathy, porphyria cutanea tarda, type II diabetes, and spina bifida in offspring.ii

(more)
• Parkinson’s Disease, hairy cell leukemia and ischemic heart disease were added to this list in 2009.
• The VA also allows compensation for children of female veterans who served in Vietnam who have achondroplasia, cleft lip or cleft palate, congenital heart disease, clubfoot, esophageal and intestinal atresia, Hallerman-Streiff syndrome, hip dysplasia, Hirschsprung Disease, hydrocephalus, hypospadias, imperforate anus, neural tube defects (including spina bifida, encephalocele, and anencephaly), Poland syndrome, pyloric stenosis, fused digits, tracheal or esophageal fistula, undescended testicle and Williams syndrome.
• All U.S. compensation is for service in Vietnam and is not specifically linked to exposure to any of the herbicides or to dioxin.iii

The U.S. government has consistently stated that no scientific evidence links Agent Orange/dioxin to adverse health effects found in Vietnam.iv However, U.S. officials have begun dialogue with Vietnamese counterparts about a humanitarian approach to the issue. In addition, Congress has appropriated $9 million over four years for environmental remediation of dioxin-contaminated sites and for related health activities, on a humanitarian basis.

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iii “Health Conditions...p.5-6