



THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON
March 25, 2003

The Honorable Lane Evans
Ranking Democratic Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Evans:

Thank you for your letter regarding veterans' exposure to herbicides during their military service in locations other than Vietnam.

During an October 2001 satellite broadcast, VA Regional Office personnel were informed that herbicides were used by the military to defoliate areas at the Korean demilitarized zone in 1968 and 1969, at Fort Drum, New York in 1959, and that herbicides were tested at other locations. Regional Office personnel were reminded that even if a veteran did not serve in Vietnam, VA will apply a presumption of service connection if there is competent evidence that a veteran was exposed to herbicides during military service and has a disease which VA recognizes as being associated with herbicide exposure (codified at 38 C.F.R. §3.309(e)).

In January 2003, the Department of Defense (DoD) provided VA with an inventory of documents which contains brief descriptions of the records of herbicide operations at specific times and geographic locations. DoD estimates that the inventory of documents reflects 70 to 85 percent of herbicide use, testing, and disposal locations outside of Vietnam and Korea. The document contains instances of the use of herbicides other than those used in Vietnam. In its current format, the document is incomplete because it does not provide any identifying information of units or individuals, and does not lend itself to aid individual veterans' claims. Regional Offices were advised via conference call on February 5, 2003, of our receipt of this information, and advised to contact the Compensation and Pension Service if they receive claims based on exposure outside of Vietnam.

A meeting was held with DoD officials on Tuesday, March 4, 2003, to obtain information regarding the units involved with herbicide operations or other information that may be useful to place veterans at sites where herbicide operations were conducted. Based upon that meeting we do not have sufficient information to process claims. We are requesting more detailed information from DoD and will provide field stations with more specific guidance when that information is received.

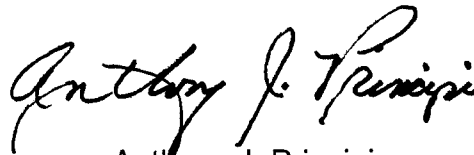
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Our lack of information as to units and individuals involved and the extent and nature of use of these chemicals currently limits outreach to veterans possibly exposed. We will advise service organizations of the information we have at our next meeting with them the week of March 17th. We will keep them advised as we get more information.

Thank you for your continuing interest in this important issue of herbicide exposure.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Anthony J. Principi". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "A".

Anthony J. Principi