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# FEDERAL GOVERNMENT TO REVIEW AGENT ORANGE COMPENSATION PACKAGE FOR N.B. BASE

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National News

By: CHRIS MORRIS

**OROMOCTO, N.B. (CP) - Veterans Affairs Minister Greg Thompson says he hopes to take a compensation package to federal cabinet this fall for people who say they were harmed by defoliant spraying at Canadian Forces Base Gagetown.**

**Thompson said he expects the proposed compensation to be around \$20,000 per person, but cabinet ultimately will approve the amount.**

**The money could be handed out next year to people who say they are suffering because of the chemical sprays applied liberally to the sprawling training base in southern New Brunswick from the 1950s to the 1980s.**

**The spray programs included U.S. military tests of such powerful defoliants as Agent Orange and Agent Purple in the 1960s. The sprays were used along with a host of other agents to clear jungles during the Vietnam War.**

**"I expect to take a proposal to cabinet very soon," Thompson said Friday during a visit to Oromocto, near CFB Gagetown.**

**"We're on track for the fall."**

**Hundreds of people who worked on the base or lived near it when the aerial sprays were used say their health was harmed by them.**

**Thompson said compensation will be limited to people who can prove they are suffering from illnesses linked to exposure to toxins in the chemical sprays.**

**He said the government will rely on research put together by the U.S. Institute of Medicine, which has listed five conditions linked to Agent Orange exposure, including non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, Hodgkin's disease, a type of leukemia and soft tissue sarcomas.**

**The institute has also identified several other diseases which may be associated with dioxin exposure, including prostate cancer, diabetes and spina bifida in the children of veterans.**

**"Most of it will hinge on existing medical information which has been established by the U.S. Institute of Medicine, where most of the research has been done on Agent Orange," Thompson said when asked about the compensation process.**

**"That is where the consideration for compensation will have to fall, on that body of medicine."**

**John Chisholm, a Gagetown veteran who is battling prostate cancer which he believes was triggered by Agent Orange exposure, said the compensation is somewhat disappointing.**

But he said people are dying and will take what they can get.

"The sooner the better," said Chisholm, who lives in the Oromocto area.

"Guys are getting older and they're dying off faster. We've got to get something for them."

In addition to the compensation process, a class action suit against the federal government will be heard in Manitoba involving about 1,500 people who say they were harmed by the Gagetown spraying programs.

Lawyers working on the suit say they believe some of the people involved are entitled to settlements of more than \$1 million each.

Art Connolly of the Agent Orange Association, which is involved in the suit, said the compensation being considered by Ottawa is just part of a public relations exercise to get rid of the issue.

"It's hush money," Connolly said.

"A compensation package in the neighbourhood of \$20,000 to \$25,000 would just about cover Greg Thompson's travel budget for three months."

The federal government began accepting applications for disability pensions linked to Agent Orange in 1995, but only a few have been granted.

A federal fact-finding mission is still investigating the Agent Orange controversy at the base.

<http://www.cjad.com/node/423375>