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https://www.postguam.com/news/local/another-vet-says-he-sprayed-agent-orange/article_4d8061be-9abf-11e8-8653-d3ff9c58732a.html

Another vet says he sprayed Agent Orange

John O'Connor | The Guam Daily Post Aug 19, 2018



COLLECTING SAMPLES: Danielle Coulombe, left, geologist with contractor AECOM, collects soil samples to be tested for suspected traces of Agent Orange while unexploded ordnance subcontractor Tuhe Viritua prepares a hole for the collection on Andersen Air Force Base in Yigo, April 23. Viritua first scanned the sampling sites, marked by orange flags, for ordnance or other hazardous objects before preparing the hole for sample collection by Coulombe. Photo courtesy of Naval Facilities Engineering Command Marianas

As residents await the outcome of two separate investigations into the presence and use of Agent Orange on Guam, another veteran is claiming to have sprayed the toxic chemical on island.

Retired Master Sgt. Sidney Tackett was stationed on Guam between 1974 and 1979. He told The Guam Daily Post that the spraying was conducted up to a year or two before his departure.

"How I knew what I was spraying, it was by the type of colored band around the 55-gallon drums it was stored in. There were different colored ones, orange and a bluish purple one," Tackett said.

AO is part of a series of "rainbow herbicides" characterized by the colored band around their drum containers.

Spraying was done around fuel storage tanks, fuel lines around Andersen Air Force Base, the weapons storage area fence line, the bomb storage area, and fuel lines across the island, Tackett said.

Tackett added that he used two items to do the spraying. One was a 2.5-ton M-series truck with a tank bed, and the other was a water tank called a "water mule," which had to be towed by larger M818 trucks.

"I don't remember the smell, just that it was nasty. Even the base dry cleaners would not take the clothes, so I had to wash them first. Then after I got married, my wife would (wash the clothes)," Tackett said.

Ongoing soil testing

In early 2017, claims of AO spraying by retired Master Sgt. Leroy Foster kicked off a series of local and federal initiatives to determine whether the chemical had ever been used or stored on Guam.

These initiatives have resulted in ongoing soil testing by local and federal regulatory agencies, as well as the military, and an investigation by the Government Accountability Office. The GAO investigation results are anticipated sometime in the fall.

Soil testing began in the middle of the year but hit a snag. The initial results were inconclusive, requiring additional sampling and testing, beginning in September.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and its Guam counterpart are in the process of expanding soil sampling.

Samples so far have been kept within Andersen Air Force Base. Some veterans have criticized the limitation and are seeking travel to Guam to assist in identifying areas where AO spraying allegedly took place.

The Guam and federal environmental agencies are in possession of signed affidavits from veterans who have shared their accounts of using or shipping AO to Guam.

Tackett said he is working on an affidavit as well. His wife has family on island and he may travel to Guam with her in the fall to show where spraying took place.

Health effects

As with other veterans claiming AO was used on Guam, Tackett is suffering from several diseases that he attributes to herbicide exposure. He had cancer and now has pulmonary nodules, or masses of tissue, in his lungs.

"When I had cancer, they did a lot of scans and a doctor asked me if I served in Vietnam. Prostate cancers, (nodules) on my lungs, rashes and diabetes – all three could be related," Tackett said.

He added that he was the first to develop cancer in his family and his wife was the first to develop breast cancer in her family. He filed a claim with the Department of Veterans Affairs nine years ago, but the response from federal authorities has been to deny herbicide use on island.

Approval of herbicide exposure claims for veterans who say they've been exposed on Guam is low. In January, the Post found 14 appeals granted by the Board of Veterans' Appeals.

Two more have been granted recently, according to Brian Moyer, a Vietnam War veteran, whose veterans group is the one seeking to travel to Guam in order to point out spray spots.

Federal legislation pending in Congress promises to expand recognition of AO exposure to Guam.

John O'Connor

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