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DEPARTMENT OF MEDICINE &
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Monsanto Company
800 N. Lindbergh Boulevard
St. Louis, Missouri 63187
Phone: (314) 694-1000

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To the editor:

The recent letter by La Vecchio et al on Agent Orange and birth defects reported that, in a group of veterans who called an organization that solicits calls about medical problems in Vietnam veterans' children, there was a high percent who described their children as "not normal".[1]

Few epidemiologists would credit such "evidence". Further, in calling for a systematic study of the problem, the authors appear to be unaware of work already done and in progress.

There has been one published study of the reproductive experience of the wives of workers exposed to chlorinated dioxins, including 2,3,7,8 TCDD, and one study of birth defects in the children of Australian Vietnam veterans [2,3]. Neither study has found any association between exposure and any of several measures of reproductive failure, including congenital malformations. In addition, a study similar to the Australian one is to be carried out by the Centers for Disease Control, while both CDC and the Air Force are conducting more comprehensive long term studies that will

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address reproductive problems as part of more comprehensive investigations.

No one can question the desirability of further studies of the concerns expressed by Vietnam veterans. What must be questioned is the failure of these authors to quote the work that has been done and is in progress, and their presentation of a predictably biased study as if it were the only data in a scientific vacuum.

William R. Gaffey

William R. Gaffey, Ph.D.

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1. La Vecchio FA, Pashayan HM, Singer W. Agent Orange and birth defects. NEJM 1983; 308:720.
2. Townsend JC, Bodner KM, Van Peenen PF, et al. Survey of reproductive events of wives of employees exposed to chlorinated dioxins. Am. J. Epid. 1982; 115:695-713.
3. Armstrong B. Australians report no link between service in Vietnam and birth defects among offspring. Epidemiology Monitor, March 1983.

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