

# Monsanto Backgrounder

MONSANTO RESPONDS TO  
AGENT ORANGE CHARGES  
July 7, 1983

MONSANTO COMPANY / ST. LOUIS, MO.

Monsanto Company issued the following statement in response to an article in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch alleging that the company disregarded warnings about dioxin during the time it manufactured Agent Orange for use as a defoliant during the Vietnam War:

A July 7 Post-Dispatch story about the company's production of the herbicide 2,4,5-T was erroneous in an early edition and misleading in later editions.

The implication in the story that levels of more than 1 ppm in the herbicide are unsafe was unsubstantiated in the 1960s, and it remains so today.

There was and is no credible scientific or medical evidence supporting claims of long-term human health effects other than the skin condition chloracne. Dioxin is probably the most tested chemical substance in the world, and there is still no evidence that it has caused the long-term health problems claimed by some Vietnam Veterans. The most recent example of this is the U.S. Air Force Ranch Hand Study, released only a few days ago, which shows that the rate of deaths for U.S. Air Force personnel who sprayed Agent Orange in Vietnam has not been higher than that for a comparative group of veterans who were not involved in aerial spraying missions. Those men, according to the Air Force, were the most heavily herbicide-exposed group of U.S. military personnel in Southeast Asia.

CONFIDENTIAL  
SUBJECT TO FOIA ORDER

C09729

The story also stated that "Monsanto's product contained up to 50 parts per million of dioxin." While there were a few times that Monsanto's 2,4,5-T may have contained dioxin levels in the 40 ppm range, those levels represented exceptions. Overall, the levels averaged much lower, and in fact, after 1965, steadily declined on a year-to-year basis.

During the time Monsanto manufactured the herbicide, our process was under continuing review, and the company took appropriate precautions to protect its employees who worked around the 2,4,5-T process at its Nitro, W. Va., plant. This workforce is probably the most medically studied employee group in the world. Three separate health studies have been completed and they all concluded that, other than chloracne, no long term health problems that could be associated with exposure to dioxin have ever been found.

Agent Orange is a highly charged, emotional issue which is being further complicated by the premature and/or unauthorized release of documents which can be unfairly interpreted out of context. We are confident that when the case is considered in the courts, our position will be upheld.

-oOo-

C09730

From:

Dan R. Bishop  
Director, Environmental Communications  
(314) 694-2891

CONFIDENTIAL