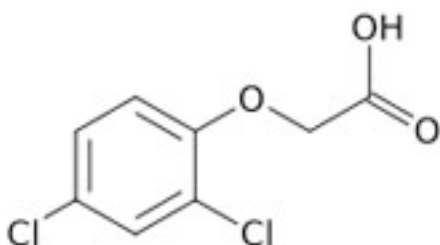


> Agent Orange Day: Remediating chemical trespass

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by *Dr. John Paull*



Wikipedia: 2,4-D - Plant hormone. Part of Agent Orange

Agent Orange Day, 10th August, is a day for us to remember the raison d'être of the organics movement. It was on this day, 51 years ago, that the USA embarked on the most audacious and extensive program of chemical warfare that the world has witnessed.

Continuously, over a decade (1961-1971), vast swathes of Vietnam's forests, waterways, and croplands were drenched and re-drenched in high dosage agricultural herbicides, reportedly up to 50 times the recommended dosages. The US military intention was to denude the land of forests and crops, and, on these crude terms, it was a success.

Estimates put the area of Vietnam affected at three million hectares (7.4 million acres). The objective was to deny cover and crops to 'the enemy'. The Viet Cong were fighting a guerrilla war to defeat the US military. They were ultimately successful in routing the invaders, but not before American planes had dispersed 71.4 million litres (18.9 million gallons) of herbicides over what were the verdant forests and crops of Vietnam. Of the smorgasbord of the US 'rainbow' herbicides, it was the notorious Agent Orange which accounted for the bulk of the toxic payload (42.5 million litres; 11.2 million gallons).

Agent Orange was a fifty/fifty mix of two herbicides 2,4-D and 2,4,5-T, (organochlorine pesticides, OCPs) which are now banned in some countries. The herbicide concoction was contaminated with a dioxin, 2,3,7,8-tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin (TCDD). TCDD causes cancers and birth defects and is toxic at parts per trillion. It can bio-accumulate in the flesh of fish and animals and hence thereby enter the food chain for humans.

The US has not paid war reparations to Vietnam, and litigation by Vietnamese victims, begun in 2004, was eventually unsuccessful. While Monsanto and Dow Chemicals immediately reaped the profit of their toxic rain, generations of Vietnamese people continue to reap the toxic and disabling legacy of the massive chemical trespass.

This year's Agent Orange Day (10 August 2012) marks the groundbreaking start of the long overdue task of remediation. The Environmental Remediation of Dioxin Contamination at Danang Airport Project is a partnership of the Governments of USA and Vietnam. The remediation site is a former US military airbase and is a 'hotspot' of dioxin contamination. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) and Vietnam's Ministry of National Defense will work together. Two contracts to a total of US\$25.34 have been awarded to US companies.

The project aims to treat 73,000 cubic metres of contaminated soil at the airport and to [complete by the end of 2016](#). The [Vietnam Agent Orange Relief and Responsibility Campaign](#) urges the observance of 51 seconds of silence at midday on 10 August 2012 to remember the tragedy of what Charles Bailey, of the [Aspen Institute](#), calls "the long tail" of America's Vietnam war.