

JULY 23, 1990

TO: LANE

FROM: LORI

RE: REVIEW OF THE AGENT ORANGE SCIENTIFIC TASK FORCE REPORT BY DR. JAMES O. MASON, ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR HEALTH FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES.

Dr. James Mason asserted in his letter that the "veterans groups [Agent Orange Scientific Task Force] AOSTF concluded that the aggregate of the weight of evidence from available epidemiologic studies establishes a causal relationship between Agent Orange exposure and a range of cancers and other health outcomes among Vietnam veterans." This assertion is followed by a conclusion that "the Science Panel concluded that an objective, critical review of the literature would not support the conclusions of the AOSTF's evaluation."

First of all, the AOSTF never sought to establish a conclusion that any of the diseases suspected of being related to Agent Orange exposure were based on a cause-and-effect relationship. It simply reviewed the existing peer-reviewed literature and applied current DVA standards for statistical significance to diseases.

The AOSTF did, however, seek to determine whether the available scientific evidence establishes a "significant statistical association" between exposure and disease. The distinction between "cause-and-effect" and "significant statistical association" cannot have been missed by Dr. Mason or anyone else at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) on whom Dr. Mason relied. This is because debate on the issue of what standard ought to be used in determining whether to provide disability compensation to ailing veterans has been ongoing for quite some time. In fact, the standard required by law, P.L. 98-542, which was upheld in federal court in May of 1989, is that of a "significant statistical association."

Along those lines, the American Tobacco Institute continues to deny the hazards of smoking by pointing to an absence of a scientifically concluded "cause-and-effect" relationship between smoking and disease. Secretary Louis W. Sullivan of the Department of Health and Human Services has himself waged a vigorous campaign against the clear and present hazards of smoking even though there is not a "cause-and-effect" relationship.

Since the Agent Orange Scientific Task Force report was released, 25 scientists have signed on as concurring, and the report will be published in the journal Teratogenesis, Carcinogenesis, and Mutagenesis in its next issue.

Additionally, Dr. Mason's July 17 response looks very much to constitute yet another chapter in the ongoing campaign by the CDC to misinform the public and congressional policy makers on the dangers of exposure to dioxin.

Chairman Applegate is sending a letter to Secretary Sullivan to express the above concerns.