

QUESTIONS FOR COLONEL WILLIAM WOLFE, USAF

General Ranch Hand Questions

X Last year in a Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee hearing, the Air Force acknowledged that the data from the 1984 Ranch Hand Morbidity Report and all subsequent Ranch Hand reports would need to be reassessed in light of a new exposure index based on serum dioxin levels the Air Force is developing. Essentially, the Air Force admitted that it was too early to make sweeping statements of "reassurance" until those data are reassessed. Why, then, did you recently claim at the National Environmental Health Conference that there appear to be no significant health problems in the Ranch Handers?

X *This conclusion couldn't have been based*
Has the data been reassessed according to the new exposure index? [If no:] Then why did you make those optimistic statements, given the limitations of the existing exposure index?

X You also told the press [see UPI article] that skin cancers were the only significant increase in the Ranch Hand group. The UPI article quotes you as saying that the skin cancer is something "we want to keep looking at, but the biggest problem is taking into account sun exposure." Isn't it true that in your testimony last May you confirmed that the excess in skin cancers in the Ranch Handers could not be explained by overexposure to the sun? [If yes:] What is the explanation for making such a misleading -- some would say patently false -- statement to the press and the American public?

X Your comments were also interesting in light of what you didn't say. You made no mention of the apparent doubling of birth defects in the Ranch Hand children -- a statistic you and the other Ranch Hand scientists have verified in the past. While it's true that the final report of those birth defects is still pending (five years after the draft report, which, in itself, is a sad commentary), that data is no less "final" than your morbidity data that still must be reassessed.

X In fact, the Air Force, and you in particular, have a habit of making such overly optimistic statements or omissions. In your December 1984 draft birth defects report [Reproductive Outcome Report] that followed up your 1984 morbidity report, you acknowledged 1) there was an approximate doubling in birth defects among the Ranch Hand children; and 2) the defects were not limited to minor skin blemishes as suggested earlier. ~~You had also learned by then that the skin cancers were not due to overexposure to the sun and that an increase in systemic cancers could not be ruled out.~~ However, in November 1985, almost a year after you submitted a draft birth defects report citing those facts, you told the San Antonio Express that the study results were "encouraging," that the birth defects were only minor skin blemishes, and that skin cancers -- the only other increase -- were probably due to sun exposure.

results in 1990

You knew these statements weren't true, but you ~~made them~~ anyway. Were you directed to make these statements, or were you acting solely on your own behalf?

Your most recent statements are an incredible repetition of your past statements that have proven to be false. Isn't it true that all the limitations of the previous Ranch Hand research -- misclassification, low power, etc. -- are still there? Why are those facts not presented to the press? Can you explain why you or the Air Force insist on making these misleading statements?

Mortality Study

Why did you release the mortality study at this point when the new exposure index is imminent? Doesn't it have the same limitations the previous studies have? When will the new index be applied to previous and future studies?

In the Mortality report, did you adjust for the "healthy worker" effect? [Answer should be no. This is important because veterans are healthier than the general population, and this must be adjusted for in epidemiological studies.] Why not? Doesn't that undermine the authenticity of your results?

H | Is it true that there was an excess among the Vietnam veteran group in violent deaths? [If he says there was an increase in violent deaths among Korean veterans, ask if there has been a quantitative comparison of the two sets of veterans to see if there's a difference in the relative increases.] Isn't it true that dioxin exposure leads to irritability and depression in animals? Could that be a possible explanation for the increase in violent deaths or suicides among Vietnam veterans?