

Art Connolly

Agent Orange Association of Canada

My name is Art Connolly and I am Vice President of the Agent Orange Association of Canada. I am honoured and I thank you for the opportunity to attend this conference and share Canada's story regarding the poisoning of so many of its people by chemical defoliants.

In May and June of 2005, the Canadian media reported that the chemical defoliant agent orange was "tested" by the U.S. military at Canadian Forces Base Gagetown New Brunswick, Canada.

At the invitation of the Canadian government the U.S. military tested Agent Orange, along with other chemical defoliants, in order to determine their effectiveness for use in Vietnam. Canada's Department of National Defence cooperated with the U.S military to test the defoliant's effectiveness for its own brush control use in Canada.

Canadian Forces Base Gagetown at 1100 sq. kms is the largest military base in the British Commonwealth and officials argue that control of its dense vegetation is necessary to prevent it from being ignited by unexploded ordinance.

According to Assistant Deputy Minister of National Defence Karen Ellis, only two barrels of the toxic defoliant "agent orange" were sprayed "under carefully controlled conditions" on 83 acres of land for a total of 7 days in 1966 and 1967.

Assistant Deputy Minister Ms. Ellis did not reveal that in the summer of 1966 the military also used the chemical defoliant Agent Purple. Agent Purple contained more than three times the level of lethal dioxin as Agent Orange. It was also laced with arsenic. Agent Purple is considered so harmful that the American military stopped its use in Vietnam, one year earlier, in 1965.

Documentation obtained from Canada's Department of National Defence via the "Access To Information Act" shows that Ms. Ellis' statement was lacking in its disclosure regarding herbicidal spraying at CFB Gagetown.

The document proves that from 1956 to 1984 there was over 1.3 million litres of liquid defoliants and 2 million lbs of dry chemical defoliants containing deadly dioxin and hexachlorobenzene were sprayed over 181,000 acres at CFB Gagetown.

Dioxin is considered to be the most dangerous substance known to science. Dioxin poisoning has been linked to a number of serious health conditions, including skin disorders, nerve disorders, type 2 diabetes and numerous cancers. Dioxin is a human carcinogen that can damage the liver, thyroid, intestinal track and nervous system. Dioxin is fat -soluble and therefore can be passed up the food chain from animals to humans. There is no method for removing dioxin from the body. It is important to note that dioxins have a half-life of five to 10 years.

In 1964 while the DND was administering its herbicidal spray program there was a "spray application accident." Increased winds carried the spray to the Upper Gagetown and Sheffield area. The results of that accident was that the Government of Canada paid approximately \$250,000 to several market gardens in the area as reparation for the damage to their crops. Many believe it was monies paid to silence the farmers and an admission of liability. According to local news reports "spray application accidents" occurred on a regular basis. In 1965, for a number of reasons, one being the spray accident, DND switched to spraying "Tordon 101" for the next 20 years, until 1984. "Tordon 101" is what the Americans called Agent White. It contained picloram and 2,4-D in a 4:1 ratio. The picloram contained an inert agent called hexachlorobenzene that has

been identified by both the U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and the World Health Organization as being a persistent bio-accumulative toxin that causes cancer.

The Environmental Protection Agency has established that hexachlorobenzene harms the liver, kidneys, blood, and lungs and the nervous, immune, and gastrointestinal systems. Yet for 20 years DND sprayed this deadly poison on the training area, where human contact was inevitable.

According to the U.S. EPA website, "Because Hexachlorobenzene...is persistent and bioaccumulative, it stays in our environment for a long time and contaminates our food chain. Hexachlorobenzene can cause severe health problems for humans...." It damages bones, kidneys, and blood cells. It can harm the immune system. It lowers the survival rate of young children. It can cause abnormal fetal development. It harms the liver and the endocrine and nervous systems, and it may cause cancer.

In 1985 in a briefing to members of the province of New Brunswick Cabinet, Major Mike Rushton admitted the government knew about and was concerned by dioxin and therefore decided not to use it after 1964. Yet the Department of National Defence knowingly used it as an ingredient in 8 of the tests conducted at CFB Gaagetown in 1966 and 1967.

As this story drew more media attention in the months following its original release the Canadian public started questioning and demanding answers from the then governing federal Liberal Party government of Canada.

Response from the Department of National Defence and the Government of Canada has been less than forthcoming. DND has been notoriously reluctant to admit anything regarding the use of chemical defoliants. They tend to admit only what has been revealed by other sources. DND and the federal government would not acknowledge

the spray program outside of 1966 and 1967 even though their very own documents prove that the spraying occurred.

According to the Department of National Defence there were 200,000 military personnel at CFB Gagetown from 1956 to 1984. This figure includes troops from Britain, Scotland and the United States have trained at CFB Gagetown.

This tragedy is not only about the soldiers who have had their health affected. It is also about the soldier's spouses and children who have died or are sick. It is about the civilian employees and their spouses and children who have died or are sick. It is about the civilians who lived in the area and their spouses and children who have died or are sick.

It is important to realize that the military base was not merely a location for military activities. Soldiers and families engaged in activities on the base such as berry and apple picking, hunting, trout fishing and drinking from streams. Thousands of children and wives were exposed to and poisoned by dioxin and hexachlorobenzene over a period of almost four decades.

For the Canadian government to say families were not exposed to the defoliation chemicals in any way is not only **a callous dismissal of fact, but also a heinous lie**, and it infuriates and frustrates the people who were there and who are sick.

DND records reveal that spraying frequently took place in relatively close proximity to surrounding communities. Distances ranged from 1 to 7 kilometres.

The Department of National Defence and the Government of Canada are not being truthful and forthright about this tragedy. It has been proven that DND sprayed deadly dioxins and hexachlorobenzene-laced defoliant from 1956 to 1984 at Gagetown. DND did not volunteer this information. DND did not take the opportunity to divulge

information about the other defoliants when first questioned about Agent Orange. DND was **NOT** transparent in any sense of the word.

DND is now asking the world to believe it is being honest and up front. DND's previous actions have spoken much louder than its present-day words. Based on DND's past actions those who are sick and those who have lost loved ones will **NEVER** believe them. The public will **NEVER** believe the effort being put forth to resolve the situation as long as DND is leading that effort. DND has no credibility in the eyes of the sick, the survivors, and now the general public

In answer to the outcry from the public the Government of Canada has created the Base Gagetown and Area Fact Finders Project. The project is led by the Department of National Defence. This begs the question why is this investigation being led by the accused?

This project is being presented as a public inquiry. It is not a public inquiry! It has no legal authority to subpoena or protect any witnesses that come forward to offer evidence.

The Project has two key responsibilities. The first is to be a conduit of information between those with concerns and the Government of Canada. The project is to hear the concerns of the community, ensure those concerns are communicated to both government and those completing the fact-finding tasks, and is to inform the community about the fact-finding work being conducted for the government.

The second responsibility is that the Coordinator of the project will provide a report to the Government of Canada through the Minister of National Defence documenting his discussions with people, including some personal comments. The Coordinator is not permitted to offer recommendations but is to merely submit facts to the federal

government. This report will be an important consideration in subsequent policy decisions made by the Government of Canada.

It is the opinion of the Agent Orange Association of Canada that this project is merely a public relations exercise put in place by the federal government to appease the public.

The Fact Finder Project has 3 tasks:

Fact-finding Task 1 will seek to identify and contact, former and current serving Canadian Forces' members, and former and current civilian employees of the Department of National Defence (DND) who were present at CFB Gagetown during the spraying of the herbicides in question. Greg Thompson, the present day Minister of Veteran Affairs, has stated "The government has those records now and could actually release those in an afternoon"

The Agent Orange Association of Canada notes that there is no mention of the spouses and children of soldiers, civilian employees and no mention of civilian neighbours. Civilian employees are advised that they must apply for Workers Compensation benefits. Spouses, children and civilians are left to leave their fate with the courts. This "divide and conquer" response by the government has not gone unnoticed by the victims and families. The government's response is **offensive and insulting** to those not recognized. Consequently a class action lawsuit has been instigated and is being led by the prestigious Canadian law firm The Merchant Law Group.

Fact-finding Task 2 will be a review of the history and science of the spraying of herbicides at CFB Gagetown from 1952 to present day and an assessment of their environmental fate and impacts.

The Agent Orange Association of Canada suggests that the government look no further than their own documentation easily obtained through the "Access To Information" Act . It gives a complete listing of all chemicals sprayed during the years in question.

Fact-finding Task 3 is divided into two parts: Part 1 is a health study that will assess potential risks to human health from the herbicides used at CFB Gagetown, based on the properties of these products and the probability and degree of exposure.

Part 2 is a descriptive epidemiological study, which would determine whether there is a higher incidence of illnesses in the population in the area surrounding CFB Gagetown, versus a control population from elsewhere.

The Agent Orange Association of Canada believes that an epidemiological study of the present population would not show true results. The 200,000 troops and their families that were at CFB Gagetown between 1956 and 1984 are no longer residents.

The Agent Orange Association of Canada believe that the Base Gagetown and Area Fact Finder project has to be dismantled. After 50 years of lies and deception from the Department of National Defence they should not be leading this investigation. The project cannot and will not be trusted.

On March 10 of this year the Department of National Defence issued a press release stating that of soil samples already tested ten percent were above accepted levels.

The other 90 percent did contain dioxins but were below Canadian Council of Ministers for the Environment (CCME) soil quality guidelines for dioxins. Considering the half life of dioxins are five to ten years, one must question what the levels would have been when the defoliants were sprayed up to 50 years ago. The soil samples were only testing for 17 of 76 possible dioxins. There has been no hexachlorbenzene testing results as of this writing.

Veteran Affairs Canada, the federal government department mandated to look after Canada's veterans, has been less than stellar in this affair. The year 2005 was the "Year of the Veteran". Unfortunately that was only in name not in practice. Although Veteran Affairs claims that it gives veterans "benefit of the doubt" when they apply for benefits it appears not to be the case when they apply for benefits due to illness from chemical defoliants.

As of March 14, 2006 reports state that were 1453 applications received, of those 17 have been approved.

In January of 2006 the Canadian public elected a new Conservative Party government. The newly elected Prime Minister Stephen Harper during his election campaign promised to provide medical testing and compensation to victims of toxic herbicide spraying by Canada's armed forces at CFB Gaagetown.

Note that Prime Minister Harper said medical testing and compensation to "victims" of toxic herbicide spraying. The Agent Orange Association of Canada takes that to mean all victims including spouses and children of military personnel as well as civilians. The Agent Orange Association of Canada also takes that to mean all toxic herbicide spraying and not only agent orange.

Media reports have stated that the newly elected government will move the Agent Orange file from the Department of National Defence to the control of Veteran Affairs Canada. As of this date that has not happened.

The Agent Orange Association has received thousands of emails, letters and phone calls from the victims of this tragedy that describe death, sickness and despair. They describe lives ruined by illnesses that in the minds of so many were unexplained. In Canada there is a lack of medical professionals that are familiar with the diagnosis and treatment of chemical poisoning. The victims have no one to turn to for medical assistance.

The Agent Orange Association of Canada believes that the Canadian government should mirror the Americans' actions and adopt a "presumptive clause" whereby if an individual both military and civilian is identified as being at CFB Gagetown during the years of spraying and is suffering or has suffered from a disease related to these chemicals then they are awarded compensation. One compensation plan should be in effect for all.

The Government of Canada must establish testing programs, and provide funds for medical care expenses not covered by medi-care. Grief and psychological counselling must also be made available. The Agent Orange Association of Canada is calling for a public inquiry into the poisoning of generations of military and civilian personnel. Finally there is one more thing required for the victims who have died, their loved ones and those who are now sick. It is the most important thing of all. An apology.

In closing I welcome you to watch what Canada does as a nation. I welcome you to watch and see if Canada's newly elected government fulfills its promises to do the right thing. I pray to God that my country Canada makes me proud and seizes the opportunity to be **the** world leader in the humane treatment of individuals suffering from chemical defoliant poisoning.

In a world that becomes smaller each and every day it is imperative that we as human beings learn to realise that chemical defoliant poisoning has happened for far too long. We need to make those responsible take accountability for the pain and suffering of the poisoned around the world. I ask each and every one of you delegates to educate me and in turn let me educate you to the things we know so that we can return to our homes and educate the world to the tragedy that so many have suffered.