



Submission No 49

Inquiry into RAAF F-111 Deseal/Reseal Workers and their Families

Name: Mr Lex Woods

**SUBMISSION IN RESPONSE TO
JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, DEFENCE AND TRADE
INQUIRY INTO RAAF F-111 DESEAL-RESEAL WORKERS AND THEIR FAMILIES**

This submission is made in support of the Deseal/Reseal Parliamentary Inquiry.

I was posted to 3AD to the Deseal/Reseal Program from Aircraft Fitter Trade Training in 1980, and spent two years working in this environment.

As documented in 'The Report of the F111 Deseal/Reseal Board of Inquiry 2 July 2001', working conditions were inadequate, dangerous and toxic

- I witnessed colleagues 'freaking out' about being asked to work in the claustrophobic conditions within the fuel tanks. I remember their concerns being largely ignored.
- I had an awareness of colleagues being sick on the job, and management being dismissive of their symptoms in the face of getting on with the job.
- I had chemicals sprayed in my eyes. I was asked to swim in the chemical pond.
- My protective gloves disintegrated whilst being exposed to chemicals such as 'MIL SPEC' and 'MEK'.
- We were issued with cotton overalls, shower caps and Ansell gloves as protection against the chemicals and water pick's blasting of sealant from the tank's walls.
- Much of the protective clothing issued was ineffective and in fact, many workers discarded the PPE due to inadequacies.
- On leaving work I would shower, and yet any perspiration would result in foul chemical odour being present. Clothing and bedding absorbed these smells and could not be removed despite several washes. This persisted for up to several weeks, for example, when on annual leave. To this day, I can still smell the stench.

Like other Deseal/Reseal workers, my health has been impacted by exposure to toxic chemicals.

There are daily consequences I have to battle and as time goes by I become more sensitive to the debilitating effects of these conditions. These conditions are documented within my medical history held by DVA. Each of these conditions has been medically assessed and most attributed to my time in Deseal/Reseal, yet in accordance with current legislation, I am ineligible for financial compensation.

I also hold grave concerns for the welfare of my children. I constantly worry about the long term medical effects they will endure, as a consequence of my exposure to toxic chemicals.

In the face of all this, I continue to hold down a responsible job. I am proud of this fact, but it comes at a huge cost to me.

My family is also impacted. I am 'spent' when my work day is complete. I have little in reserve for them when I get home. I am also indebted to my wife and children who have endured the effects of my health issues and who have supported me throughout the years.

It has taken enormous resolve on my part to achieve professional advancement, yet I live with the knowledge that my health will always be compromised as a result of a workplace health and safety failure.

I have serious concerns for my future wellbeing. I am nauseated by the fact that I have to constantly parade my personal and family particulars to prove that this sordid mess ever happened, and that it has impacted on me.

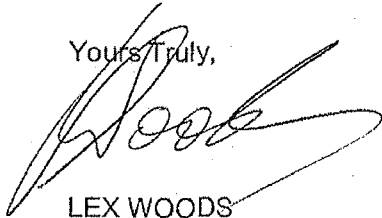
From this inquiry, I seek assurance that the Australian Government will:

- Accept responsibility that my life has been irreversibly impacted by my involvement in the Deseal/Reseal Program.
- Introduce new legislation to enable ex gratia payment to be made to those participants who have not yet been paid.
- Introduce new legislation to increase the ex gratia payment.
- Amend existing legislation to enable financial compensation to be determined on the whole effect of chemical exposure.

I also seek justice out of this Inquiry; surely a reasonable request in a country that prides itself on 'a fair go for all'. I was affected, whilst doing this job for my country, as a loyal Royal Australian Air Force Airman.

I would also greatly appreciate Australian Government acknowledgement of the enormous efforts of the 'Goop Troop Support Group' members who have fought tirelessly for this cause. It is only due to their tenacious commitment, that this massive OH&S failure has been exposed.

Yours Truly,



LEX WOODS

