



Submission No 58

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

Name: **Name withheld**

[REDACTED]

As the parents of a former member of the F1-11 Deseal/Reseal programme we wish you to consider our comments seriously.

The Rudd Government would / should be aware of the results of previous enquiries which were far from complimentary regarding the work practices used by the RAAF and therefore needs no further elaboration.

Our son enlisted in the RAAF on January 26th 1991 and was posted to Wagga Wagga to undergo his basic training and then complete his air frame fitter's course after which he went to Amberley to work on the F1-11's.

In 1997, he was posted back to Wagga Wagga to re-write the air frame fitter's course. During 1998 he implemented this course he had designed to the next group of trainees before returning to Amberley in 1999.

During 1999 he successfully completed the RAAF's confined spaces training course which resulted in him becoming involved in the deseal/reseal maintenance programme.

In September 1999, [REDACTED] and his wife [REDACTED] had their first child. When we visited them in December 1999, [REDACTED] was well and truly involved in the deseal/reseal programme. On his return from work we noticed that he smelt strongly of chemical. When I asked him about this he told me that we all smell like it at the end of each shift. As a baby he was a profuse sweater and this has continued into his adult life. [REDACTED] told us that the smell from the chemicals sweating from [REDACTED] body necessitated washing the bed linen about every second day caused her headaches and aggravated her asthma. [REDACTED] told me that he was getting more headaches than he had ever had in his life but thought it may be due to constantly having to look upwards while performing his maintenance duties.

Although we accepted his explanation at the time, I began to feel a considerable amount of uneasiness based on what I had experienced with my Vietnam Veteran brother. At times [REDACTED] who was normally unflappable, seemed to be becoming less patient with people and having trouble concentrating and remembering. He has suffered from constant headaches since.

When [REDACTED] was filling out one of the questionnaires for the SHOAMP study while visiting us, I noticed that he had trouble concentrating and at one stage was shaking like an alcoholic with the D.T's. On this occasion, it took him three attempts, interspersed by a couple of short naps to complete this exercise.

As a parent I consider that the ex-gratia payments were totally inadequate and this was simply a pitiful act of political expediency from a Government that wanted to appear to be listening. At the time I believed this was a tactic to divert the public's attention from the fact that there appeared to be no intention of adequately financially compensating these defense personnel for being victims of proven unsafe work conditions. It would take provision of extremely compelling evidence to convince me that this is not the case.

I notice that this inquiry does not include any study of the impact of this exposure to these toxic chemicals on the service personnel's immediate family. This should have been included.

After the birth of [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]'s first child, she experienced a number of miscarriages prior to the birth of their second child Lucas in July 2007. [REDACTED], their first born, despite being described by his teachers as quite intelligent is experiencing the following difficulties at school:

- a) Difficulty in maintaining concentration.
- b) Difficulty in establishing and maintaining friendships.
- c) An unwillingness to complete routine classroom tasks as required.
- d) An unsatisfactory standard of behaviour which results in his being sent to the Principal's office on a regular basis.
- e) Hand-eye co-ordination is way below that which I, as a former teacher who specialized in coaching various sports, would expect from a child of almost 9 years of age.
- f) Hand-eye-foot co-ordination as for (e) above.
- g) Inability to cope with change.

I have wondered how much passively absorbed chemical has accumulated in his body from normal incidental contact with his father in the family situation. After having seen the results of chemical contamination on the health of my brother and many of his associates, especially their families, I believe that:

- a) A thorough examination of the current and future impact of these materials in the health of all persons connected with the deseal/reseal programme must be conducted. A lifetime commitment to these people is essential.
- b) These people should be able to receive medical support equal to that of any defence personnel who have served in combat zones. The only cessation of medical support in all of its form should only occur on the death of the recipients and their immediate families.
- c) A thorough investigation into the incidence of miscarriages amount he females with any connection with the deseal/reseal programme.
- d) A thorough review of behavioural/educational issues related to the children of these service personnel. Based on personal experience through social contact and my former employment as a teacher, I believe there is a strong correlation between the Vietnam Veterans and the deseal/reseal personnel.

I further believe that the workers employed on the deseal/reseal programme should receive the following:

- a) Financial recompense at least equivalent to that which an employee would receive for injuries sustained at work due to employer negligence. The enquiries conducted by the previous government indicate a clear neglect of safe work practices which would not be condoned in the private sector where unions had the right to demand the enforcement of this matter.
- b) Loans for purchase of property whether it be a home, farm or business should be available to these people at the same rate as the War Service Loans have been to those who served in combat areas. Those who have purchased property etc. should be able to re-negotiate their loans to the same rate and repayment structure as the War Service Loans.
- c) Financial support for the education of the children of these service people regardless of their pecuniary circumstances should be available at all levels of primary, secondary and tertiary. There should be no means testing of this 'benefit'.
- d) Financial support for the further education of the spouses of these workers in order to provide them with the means of obtaining the skills necessary for gaining genuine employment in the event of the death of the service person. Put simply the widow/widower of the deceased must be provided with a potential fall back employment position.

Regardless of the amount of compensation these people receive, it is not going to restore their health but it may contribute to them having a quality of life which I believe anyone who has served this country in the defence forces is entitled to.

We are proud of the fact that our son is currently holding down a very responsible position in the company for which he works. We are very aware of the time he spends preparing and presenting his work and the 'little tricks' he has devised to ensure that he remains on task when doing his presentations. We are extremely proud of the high regard in which he is held by his employer and colleagues and the positive comments they receive from the clients with whom he has contact is heartening.


As hard working parents who take pride in whatever we do, it is with great pleasure that we see evidence of these qualities in each of our children. We find it extremely worrying when circumstances force us to observe the subtle changes in our son. Our other two children, have, on occasions, told us of their ongoing concerns regarding their brother's health.


We realize that parenthood brings about changes in various ways but our son has shown evidence of the following:

- a) Severe mood swings,
- b) Anxiety attacks,
- c) Irritability over events that prior to his involvement in the desecal/reseal programme he would have laughed off.
- d) An abnormal number and severity of headaches
- e) Unusual concentration lapses during a normal conversation with me, often prefaced by 'what was I saying?'

In my opinion the only positive outcomes from his time in the RAAF is his marriage to a decent and extremely supportive wife, and the birth of our two beautiful grandsons.

If I could have my time over again, and being able to foresee the ongoing damage to his health, I would not have signed his enlistment papers.


25th June 2008


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