



**Submission 86**

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

**Name:**

**Name withheld**

[REDACTED]

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I would like for my submission and address details not to be displayed on the website, name is OK.

I am one of the original personnel who brought this matter to light in 1999. This was due to mine and members in my section (FTRS aka Deseal/Reseal) health obviously deteriorating. I joined the RAAF in January 1991 as an Airframe Apprentice.

My symptoms have been headaches, memory and concentration problems and mood swings. Even attempting to write this is causing anxiety and I am concerned I won't cover everything I need to. I have also suffered from severe reflux and ulcers which resulted in one operation before leaving the RAAF and a further operation to fix the first one. I have registered, as far as I can tell, all the relevant paperwork. However, my concern is that the current F111 HCS is not sufficient. I can receive relevant assessment and treatment; however this does not cover lost income to attend these appointments. Subsequently due to the use of my allocated sick leave in 2005 to have my second operation (mentioned above); I needed to take Leave Without Pay. I am very reluctant to seek further treatment since this will adversely affect my current employment, by placing greater stresses on my colleagues and use my allocated sick leave which I tend to require for other general illnesses. Further to this it would place more stress on my family because of the restricted income, particularly if we were trying to by a house. Since this is the case, it would highlight the fact I can seek relevant assessments and treatments under the F111 HCS is pointless.

Part way through the initial Board of Inquiry I decided to discharge from the RAAF as I had had enough and couldn't see that there would be any change. It was only friends that coaxed me to stay for my full ten years, so I would at least benefit from my Long Service Leave. As an apprentice I had a 4+4+1 term and would have carried on for my twenty given the right environment of OH&S and attitudes in the defence.

Since my time in the RAAF as an Airframe/Engine Technician I was involved in fuel tanks. Initially when I was posted to the F111 R5 section I was required to enter the Wing Carry Through Box to remove and fit parts for Non-destructive Inspections to be carried out. This involved removing as much fuel as possible and then continuing into the tanks using cut up garbage bags to prevent fuel from getting on your clothes (Garbage bags have no specific chemical resistant properties.).

I have always been OH&S conscious. During my time I was involved in rewriting the National Aerospace curriculum. This involved technical information and importantly safety requirements as a lot of the course was for external self paced training. One of my biggest issues with any of my work has been in the OH&S area. I cannot stand people or employers who do not or cannot abide by OH&S standards. And the fact that this deseal issue was a PROVEN KNOWN issue by the USAF prior to its implementation in Australia, cannot disappoint (to put lightly) me further.

My relatively short time in the deseal section required numerous tank entries, including several actually carrying out the 'Spray Sealing' process. During a spray seal service I would be required to defuel, depuddle and finally rag out the fuel. Further maintenance of picking sealant, spray painting primer and initial resealing. This required several entries in itself, in all tanks. The forward tanks are not so bad for a person my size. However entering the rear tanks (between the engines) is what I liken to be similar (although mostly smaller) to crawling in your kitchen cupboards (often upside down) with toxic chemicals spilt everywhere.

Attempting this in normal clothing is not too bad (if you don't have a problem with confined spaces). However, when carrying out the spray seal, we would wear a cool suit, two layers of plastic overalls, supplied breathing air mask all with associated 'life-line tubes' taped together to prevent leakage. This required a toilet break before starting the job and not finishing, going on a break or going to the toilet for up to five hours. To stop the operation once started would cause integrity problems in the sealing process. Also once inside the aft tanks it was difficult to exit easily.

Based on the fact the exit of the tanks was difficult using this equipment an emergency exit and cutting procedure was developed, including the research and purchase of suitable intrinsically safe cutting equipment.

It was discovered, during research for the initial Board of Inquiry, that the safety equipment (PPE) was insufficient for the types of chemicals we were using, or the time the equipment was exposed. I was part of this investigation, research team and inquiry. Further to this there was a submission of personnel and safety records from the USAF (submitted to the inquiry) that there had been ongoing health issues with USAF staff and contractors involved in the same processes going back years.

Based on this information, we pressed for the inquiry to include previous deseal project participants. This took numerous discussions and information from numerous previous deseal staff and ex-RAAF personnel. Finally the inquiry agreed to include these personnel given the large amount of circumstantial evidence.

I am very proud of my contribution to this issue and subsequent investigation given the fact that it has given a window for that previous deseal personnel, at the very least, an opportunity to obtain treatment.

My main concern now is to try to get suitable treatment, if it doesn't interfere with my employment. My second concern is my immediate family, being my two sons. According to the F111 SHOAMP my children can obtain counselling through the scheme. However, I don't believe this goes far enough as the chemical problems could be causing them other neurological problems. My eldest son although great at home has had continuous problems at schools since he started in 2005. He has been on first name basis with the principal since his first day! Although he is quite smart technically, he cannot maintain concentration at school and this causes him to be disruptive and gets himself into trouble. The usual response of dosing him up prescriptions is NOT an option since he is exceptionally behaved at home and when we are out. This can be testified by our friends and family. I am extremely concerned that our second child who has just turned one may have the same issues. To have this imposed on our children (and other family's children involved) is a disgrace to say the least, considering this was a KNOWN problem!

Since leaving the RAAF I have managed to successfully maintain any employment fields I have chosen. To the point where I have risen to the top of my fields without my problems causing direct issues at work. I always work extremely hard to maintain my positions, to the point I have developed strategies to learn and cope. I use my laptop diary and a PDA to constantly remind me of virtually everything. This has led to me not being able to maintain this 24 hrs a day and as such can only endure so much at home. If my wife hadn't been so understanding I would have been divorced long ago! I am also surprised that I have maintained my current position for longer than two years. As my previous tolerance to maintaining my 'facade' has only lasted about two years. I have then chosen to move onto other employment.

Before leaving the RAAF I had started a University Degree. But due to my headaches and concentration issues I was unable to complete it. When I left the RAAF I was a full time father to our then, 14 month old son. This was when I was supposed to be studying also and with only my wife's income to support us I couldn't cope. I enjoyed my time as a full time father and I believe this helped considerably when I left the RAAF. However, I know that my posting to this section robbed me of a decent pension, career, future and good health.

I hope that my (and other colleagues) initial and continued efforts will not be in vain with this problem as we have seen with many other defence issues. In my opinion if the current F111 HCS and SHOAMP schemes are not sufficient, particularly when it comes to immediate loss of income. This loss of income further impacts on our family when it comes to paying for general bills, especially in the current economic climate. Also if the Military Compensation and Rehabilitation Scheme (MCRS) could be reviewed and overhauled this would also go a long way to assist personnel who have NOT served in a war zone. The MCRS scheme is far from sufficient also as I have been getting treatment for another defence work related injury since 1995.

I can no longer be around any light chemical or perfume smells. This means I cannot use cleaning products to assist at home and my wife makes sure she uses these chemicals only occasionally, always when I am not at home. This also means my wife and I cannot wear any fragrances as it affects me and causes headaches. I cannot use any garden chemicals as the slightest hint of these has an affect also. I have reported an instance of this, which was rejected by the F111 HCS as not relevant to my claim.

No doubt I have forgotten and left other important information relevant to this submission, however I hope it is useful and assists with this hearing committee and our plight. I also hope that the public hearings can be increased to include a visit to Adelaide. Since discharging from the RAAF and moving to Canberra I found that the information and assistance diminished the further away I was. Subsequently since moving to Adelaide I might as well be in another country due to the amount of information and assistance I have received. Even meeting with an RSL advocate didn't provide me with any assistance or other avenues.

Thank you for your time.  
Regards,

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