



Submission No 75

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

Name: Mr A J Walsh

Submission F-111 Deseal/Reseal Parliamentary Inquiry

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I wish to have my submission for consideration for inclusion in the Terms of reference for the F-111 Deseal/Reseal Parliamentary Inquiry.

Statement of Involvement with Deseal/Reseal Process or Chemical Exposure.

1. I was posted to 82 Wing at Amberley on the 25th May 1971. For a period of two and a half years, I worked on Phantom and F111 Engines at Engine Workshop. My exposure to AVTUR and ENGINE OIL was a daily occurrence in my job as an engine fitter. I worked at the engine Test Cell where it was common to be sprayed in OIL MIST and AVIATION FUEL during engine testing. I was also required to use JET CLEAN B to wash engine components, which was applied with a cloth or brush, than hosed off. We cleaned the engine test cell area and workshop weekly, using GAMILIN, to clean and remove grease and fuel. No Personal Protective Equipment was available during these procedures.
2. I was posted to 482 Squadron at Amberley on the 1st February 1974.
 - My duties there included the removal and installation of F111 engines, requiring the disassembly and assembly of FUEL and HYDRAULIC components. It was unavoidable whilst completing these tasks not to have the products splashed onto your person. Overalls were generally worn, but due to the high temperature in the work area, shorts and t-shirt were the norm.
 - I was cross trained as an Airframe Fitter and during the initial period of the F111 aircraft, before the official start of the Deseal/Reseal program, aircraft that had bad fuel leaks were repaired by us at 482 Squadron in both the main hanger and a portable rag hanger assembled opposite 482 Squadron Engine Workshop. These repairs were carried out by us gaining entry to the empty fuel tanks, crawling through to the affected area and than by torchlight, picking off the protective sealant away from the fuel tank walls and joints using scrapers and scribes. PREPSOL was than applied to thoroughly clean the area (some areas were in excess of 1mt square). New sealant was than mixed and applied to the desired area.
 - The sealant used for these repairs were stored in a fridge adjacent to our section lunchroom, directly next to our lunch storage fridge. We mixed these sealants at the same tables that were used as our lunch tables. No

breathing apparatus were available for this mixing process and sealant that had gone hard or was in excess to requirements were disposed of in the normal lunch and hanger waste bins. No warnings were ever issued to personnel as to any dangers with these products.

- This process was conducted over a period of years and I was personally employed in the mixing, resealing and re-applying of sealant for in excess of 12 months. I was also in close proximity of the remainder of this initial Deseal/Reseal procedure of mixing and application for an additional 4 years, giving assistance when required on a regular basis.
- For entry into the F111 fuel tanks, the Personal Protective Equipment supplied to us was: white overalls for the tank entry, respirator attached to breathing air line and rubber gloves.
- After each tank entry my skin was very sensitive and tingled for some hours later, with my lips actually stung. Time spent in the tanks was approximately 3 hours per day.
- From 1974 to 1981 I was continually exposed to AVIATION FUEL, ENGINE and HYDRAULIC OIL and also to a toxic additive called HI_TECH. It was added to the F111 fuel to facilitate the lubrication of the afterburner fuel pump.
- A daily task carried out by myself and the squadron personnel over this long period was the cleaning off of HYDRAULIC OIL, ENGINE OIL and REVERTED SEALANT that oozed from all areas of the F111 aircraft at most panel fixtures. This grey REVERTED SEALANT was the sealant used by the official Deseal/Reseal operation, breaking down and forming a sticky mess on the aircraft panels. The method used to clean these panels was to soak a rag in AVIATION FUEL (taken from the F111 fuel drain traps) and wiping down the affected areas. This process was very messy and resulted in our clothing and exposed limbs usually contaminated with this hard to remove sealant. This panel cleaning was a constant process and was part of the duties of an engine fitter on F111 aircraft that I performed over 15 years. My wife used to wash my contaminated clothes in our family washing machine.
- Most Fridays from 1974 to 1981, I was required to assist with the washing of F111 aircraft. (To remove the reverted Deseal/Reseal sealant). A product called JET CLEAN B mixed with AVTUR was used. This product was particularly pungent to the airways and if not diluted sufficiently, left red welts on exposed skin and stinging eyes. The mixture was brushed onto aircraft panels then hosed off using water and it was impossible not to emerge fully drenched after this task. No protective clothing or breathing apparatus were available.
- In January 1986 I was posted to 1 Squadron Amberley working on F111 aircraft. During the next 3 years I was involved with most of the previous stated procedures with exception to the tank entry. An additional task required to be carried out by us at 1 Squadron was the engine compressor wash. A chemical TURCO 5884 was introduced to a mix of water through a nozzle into the aircraft intake whilst the engine was running, with the

supposed purpose to wash the internal areas of the engine. The resultant spray mist emitted from the engine at the engine run area resulted in all personnel present, becoming absolutely soaked in the product. After approximately 2 years using this product, I was advised by CHEMWATCH that this product was extremely carcinogenic and toxic, which was contrary to the advice given to me by the Senior Medical Officer at Amberley who is on record as stating that the product was completely harmless. As a result of the Chemwatch findings, I submitted a Non Compliance Report and eventually this practice was halted in late 1987. I arranged to have all 1 Squadron personnel affected by this product, medical documents annotated with an entry confirming their exposure to TURCO 5884.

- When the initial inquiry into the Deseal Reseal was started, we were informed that all personnel associated with the process, both 'pick and patch' as well as the Official program would be recognized. But when the Claim Form for the Lump Sum was released, it was evident from the content, that the Squadrons (1, 6 and 482) were being omitted.
- My claim was rejected even though I qualified as a Group 1 Participant, but because the Squadron personnel have not been labeled as "Official Program" my claim does not stand. My duties from February 1974 to May 1975 were tank entries to de-puddle/pick and patch/mix sealant/re-apply sealant. I averaged 2 days per week in F111 fuel tanks over 64 weeks totaling in excess of 128 days. In addition, I was attached to 3AD for 5 days in December 1978 to carry out pick and patch relief, where I spent those 5 days applying sealant to internal wing tanks on the F111. From May 1975 until March 1980 I also carried out the pick and patch duties ad-hoc when required due to shortage of personnel or aircraft priorities where I averaged 1 full day every three months inside tanks which totaled in excess of 20 days.
- My disappointment with the end result was that I and many more Squadron personnel spent a considerable amount of time exposed to numerous chemicals and in confined spaces similar to those experienced by 3AD personnel but we were excluded. Some members of 3AD were paid money just because they were in the same area as the Deseal/Reseal project but did not even enter a tank, whilst we at the Squadrons, spent many hours actually doing the work but were denied status.
- My present Senior Design Engineer was posted into 6Squadron when he first arrived at Amberley as an Engine Fitter. He spent 1 week repairing an F111 fuel tank and was paid \$10,000. This was due to his supervisor ensuring that his Record of Employment was annotated with the word 'Deseal/Reseal.' Our records in the early days did not have any entries, as this and numerous other tasks were not regarded as specialized and there were common, normal duties.
- I conversed with the former Minister for Veterans Affairs Mr. Billson, who informed me that "as the pick and patch activities was an ongoing activity which would have been very difficult to identify, so people

performed this task outside a FORMAL Deseal/Reseal program were not included in the current study” Well this is completely wrong, as we were all involved in the study and I was at many meetings where the current Chief of the Defence Force Air Chief Marshal Houston, assured us from the Squadrons that we were all included. Mr. Billson went on to state that the definition of a Deseal/Reseal participant was developed in close consultation with Department of Defence over 18 month period. The Lump Sum Payment Team comprised the following:-

- (a) RAAF Group Captain (Personnel management background – no F111 knowledge).
 - (b) RAAF Warrant Officer (Extensive Deseal/Reseal engineering background – this member Gary Murphy has a bias towards the Squadron personnel. He was never involved with any of the Squadrons and has personally stated to me that we at the Squadrons did not do anything like the official programs and therefore should not be given a lump sum. I consider that it was his influence that has been detrimental to equality with the payment and access to claims to squadron personnel).
 - (c) RAAF Sergeant (Researching service records)
 - (d) Departmental Delegate (was influenced solely by above Warrant Officer)
- Myself and two other Squadron personnel made representation to the former member for Blair Cameron Thompson who tried to assist at the time .In a letter back to him from Mr. Billson, it was stated that “The tempo of fuel tank repairs carried out at 482, 1 and 6 Squadrons may at times have been intense in order to meet operational requirements. However the work undertaken as part of the four formal DSRS Programs was very different, in both its scale and complexity, from ad hoc maintenance activities carried out at squadron level”. Well we have supervisor’s logs and members pay slips that prove that these Squadron members at 482 Squadron were involved for a considerable time in Deseal/Reseal activities full time with equipment borrowed from the Official Deseal Program... How can these personnel who meet all the criteria set out by the eligibility test be denied?
 - I have also in my possession a copy of a Minute from a Squadron Leader Campbell which discusses 6 Squadron personnel who had been desealing the aft and saddle tanks on Aircraft A8-114 in April 89 on a single shift basis, and the Minute acknowledges the OIC AMF 482 Squadrons verbal offer to provide 6 personnel to form a second shift.
 - I have attached as Annex A a minute from 482 Squadron OIC MCS covering a period from 1972 to 1976. It clearly identifies that we were exposed to chemicals and did in fact carry out Deseal/Reseal duties as early as 1973.
 - The following is a list of current disabilities that have either been recognized or rejected by Veterans Affairs that I have and consider linked to the Deseal Reseal Program:

- (a) Solar Keratosis - recognised
- (b) Non Melanotic Neoplasm of the skin - recognised
- (c) Tinea - recognised
- (d) Contact Dermatitis - recognised
- (e) Erectile Dysfunction – recognised
- (f) Anxiety disorder and claustrophobia – recognised
- (g) Allergic Rhinitis, Chronic Simple Bronchitis and Vasomotor Rhinitis – recognised
- (h) Headaches – rejected
- (i) Touch sensitivity – rejected
- (j) Memory loss – rejected
- (k) Blood pressure – rejected
- I believe that this committee should ensure that the Group 1 personnel from 482 Squadron, 1 and 6 Squadrons are included in the lump sum payment and have access to the same claims as people from 3AD. I don't begrudge the people from the official programs receiving their dues, but I do object strongly to the Squadron personnel being shut out and told that the time we spent inside F111 fuel tanks, soaked in fuel using chemicals to repair leaks, doesn't count, but people who have never seen the inside of a tank were readily given all the advantages and payments of full participants.

A.J. Walsh
June08