

## VA needs to press research on Gulf War illness

Veterans of the 1990-91 war in Iraq continue to struggle with the government for proper attention to the mysterious illnesses known as "Gulf War syndrome."

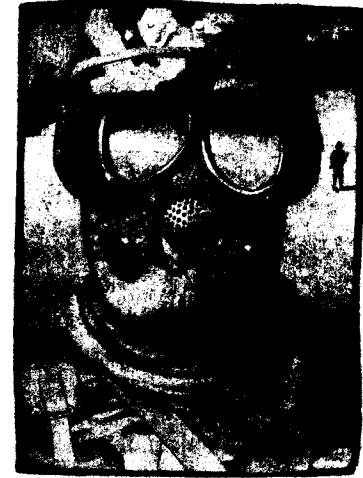
Years of research into those illnesses has linked many of them to the use of pesticides and a nerve-gas antidote used by U.S. forces during that war. That research, while not absolutely conclusive, gives the lie to what the government had been telling vets who suffer from brain damage, gastrointestinal diseases, fatigue, memory loss, chronic diarrhea, joint pain and persistent headaches.

Post-traumatic stress, the feds said. A psychiatric condition.

No way, says the lead researcher into Gulf War illness at the University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center.

"Now we know it's a real disease caused by chemical exposure," epidemiologist Robert Haley told The Dallas Morning News.

However, the Veterans Administration has canceled the Texas medical center's \$75 million contract to study the disease and figure out effective treatment. The department said that Haley's research has violated many research protocols; critics have questioned his methodology.



We can't judge Dr.

Haley's contract performance. But his work, and other confirming research, makes clear that this work needs to continue. If not with Dr. Haley's group, then with someone else.

Haley's conclusion, that Gulf War illness is "a real disease" and not a manifestation of stress, received powerful confirmation in 2008. That's when a congressionally sanctioned group of scientists, medical experts and military vets found Gulf War illness was fundamentally different from stress-related syndromes.

The Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans Illnesses pulled together work of scientific and government investigations and found the evidence "leaves no question that Gulf War illness is a real condition."

The Veterans Administration continues to resist that conclusion.

At stake is what could be billions of dollars in veterans' disability benefits.

Much more important, what's at stake is the health of up to one in four Gulf War vets who may be suffering from chemical exposures inflicted by their own forces with the best of intentions.

The VA has a troubling track record in these matters. It took decades for the government to acknowledge the terrible effects of Agent Orange and other toxic defoliants used in Vietnam.

And the official response to the Gulf War illness was first to blame it on stress. Then there was foot-dragging.

No more delays — and let's not lose whatever knowledge Dr. Haley and his colleagues have gained.

The nation owes Gulf War vets its best effort to zero in on causes and cures. Anything less is betrayal.

**BOTTOM LINE:** Evidence is strong that Gulf War illness is real. Let's stand by our vets and find out how to treat it.

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