

**AGENT ORANGE, from page 5**

Film festival organizer and Friendship Village board member, Luening, said it's not about what the federal commemoration is saying; it's about what it isn't saying. "It's presenting facts out of context," she said, "and it's about glorifying that war so that kids will be inspired to fight in future wars."

When Street Roots asked the federal commemoration's spokesperson, Victor Lopez, if his agency plans to include any events or informative materials in its agenda regarding the lasting effects of Agent Orange and PTSD, or about the anti-war movement and veterans who joined it, he said, "Those types of issues don't even remotely fall into what we do."

The commemoration's official website, [www.vietnamwar50th.com](http://www.vietnamwar50th.com), states five objectives that, summarized, basically say the intent of the federal project is to honor and pay tribute to Americans and U.S. allies who made contributions during the war. Lopez said his agency's function is to approve requests from organizations that want to be program partners and to send them starter kits with information on how to host a commemorative event to honor and thank Vietnam veterans and their families in their area.

The commemoration's official website also offers educational resources specifically for "teachers and students in the grades 7 to 12." It also states that the program's History and Education office "will develop high quality educational content for classroom use based on best practices of pedagogy."

The educational resources available on the site include fact sheets, posters, a timeline and maps — none of which make any mention of the lasting effects of war or the anti-war movement. "This agency doesn't deal with those particular issues," said Lopez.

Also absent from the educational materials is any reference to the 19 million gallons of dioxin-based herbicides, including Agent Orange, that were sprayed over Vietnam in order to clear the jungle so that U.S. troops could see the enemy hiding below.



Soldiers detect unexploded ordnance and defoliant Agent Orange during the launch of the "environmental remediation of dioxin contamination" project, in Vietnam's central Da Nang City June 17, 2011. REUTERS/KHAM

Shea, who says he lives every day with the ghosts of his deceased son and brother, as well as those lost in the war, believes that the way the nation chooses to handle the Agent Orange legacy and other lingering issues leftover from the Vietnam War, such as PTSD, sets the precedent for what veterans returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan will have to deal with.

Like the Vietnam veterans before them, many of these younger veterans — and their descendants — may also face myriad future health problems caused by their exposure to toxic chemicals while serving their country.

Many of the long-term effects of exposure to depleted uranium, burn pits and the other hazardous materials used by the U.S. military in Iraq and Afghanistan are still unknown.

"If we can't resolve the issues of 50 years ago," said Shea, "then they will be fighting the same thing for the next 50 years."

Now, decades after the conclusion of the war, Shea says veterans who fought in Vietnam, along with younger veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, continue to seek out his organization, Veterans for Peace.

Shea, along with several other local

veterans and activists, will introduce discussions after each film with their own stories from the war and about how it still affects them to this day. They say they hope people leave the festival with a more complete picture of what took place during the Vietnam era, and a better understanding about the long-lasting ramifications of war, and how wars affect many people for many generations after they are over.

"We're speaking our truth. It's honest and sincere, and I honestly believe it does set us free," said Shea.

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— Street Roots, June 4, 2013

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