

# LIKE SHEEP TO THE SLAUGHTER?

By [Deseret News](#)

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Ray Peck remembers the wintry morning of March 14, 1968, in Skull Valley as crisp and beautiful. "It was so pretty, I couldn't resist eating a handful of the new snow."

Then he saw the dead birds. In the distance, a dying rabbit struggled. "It was weird, but I just went to work," Peck says. He, like the animals, had been outside the previous night when a notorious Army nerve-agent accident proceeded invisibly. Soon, 6,000 sheep near his home would die. A helicopter from the Army's nearby Dugway Proving Ground would land in his yard and disgorge officials who Peck says collected dead wildlife and performed blood tests on his frightened family.

Scientists say nerve agent VX from an Army jet killed the sheep, probably through contact with droplets on plants and snow - like the snow Peck ate. The Army never agreed unequivocally, but it paid \$1 million in damages to ranchers. The Army also always insisted that no humans in Skull Valley were affected. \*

But now, 25 years later, that longtime Army claim about human safety is in question because of documents the Deseret News obtained through the Freedom of Information Act. They suggest:

- Peck and his family were possibly exposed to small levels of VX in 1968. They became sick with what Army documents say may be symptoms of low-level VX exposure. Also, blood tests that the Army said proved residents were not exposed are now considered inconclusive by other scientists.

- That exposure could have led to long-term illnesses the Pecks have suffered ever since, including violent headaches, numbness and "bouts of paranoia." Scientific studies say some other people exposed to VX have reported similar long-term sickness.

- Evidence that nerve agent caused such problems is not conclusive, in part because the Army did no follow-up testing on Skull Valley residents - even though reports into the accident called for it. Ironically, the Army did follow up on livestock.