Porton 'guinea pigs' to sue MoD

Rob Evans
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Human "guinea pigs" who were subjected to painful chemical warfare experiments are to sue the Ministry of Defence for assaulting them, it was announced yesterday. Lawyers said the MoD had left them no alternative after the ministry rejected proposals to compensate them.

Many military personnel claim that they were tricked into taking part in the experiments at the chemical warfare establishment at Porton Down, Wiltshire, because they were led to believe that they were volunteering for research into the common cold.

They say they were not told what they were going to be tested with before the experiments. They believe that Porton Down failed to obtain their informed consent to participate in the poison gas tests and, in effect, assaulted them.

The experiments are already being investigated by Wiltshire police.

Yesterday Alan Care of solicitors Russell Jones and Walker, who represents the human guinea pigs, accused the MoD of treating them with contempt. He is to start legal action claiming damages for hundreds of the volunteers.

At a meeting on Monday MoD officials rejected his suggestions for compensating the volunteers.

Around 25,000 military personnel have been experimental subjects at Porton Down since the first world war in what is the longest running programme of chemical warfare tests on humans in the world.

Many were exposed to chemical weapons such as nerve gas, mustard gas, and tear gas. Many have complained that the tests ruined their health for years afterwards.

Under growing pressure, the MoD announced last week that the volunteers could have free medical check-ups, but the volunteers are instead demanding an independent inquiry into their health complaints.

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