

1ST DISTRICT SERVICE OFFICER VA & R REPORT FOR JULY 2021



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Notes of Interest;

Did you know many veterans often fail to file claims for disability either because they are not aware that they can, or because they don't think their disability would apply? Disabilities need not be combat or even work related; they can be the result of playing ball, falling out of bed, participating in unit PT, or car accidents on leave. Any veteran with a current health problem that they believe started on or as a result of their active duty should consider filing a claim with VA. For those veterans already receiving VA disability for service-connected conditions, be aware that disabilities seldom improve over time; they normally worsen. If a veteran who is service-connected for a disability believes that their disability has gotten worse, they should apply for a reevaluation of their disability level. Some VSOs strongly prohibit their clients from applying for an increase for fear of a disability reduction. At the same time, if a veteran has new and compelling evidence that would justify an increase, it is always prudent to discuss with an accredited VSO first.

Nobody knows how much a massive health care package earmarked for veterans affected by military toxic exposure will cost -- and Republicans want a price tag and further analysis from the Department of Veterans Affairs before the bill moves forward. The House and Senate Veterans Affairs committees are trying to pass legislation that would provide care and disability compensation for a half-century's worth of veterans sickened by burn pits and other environmental toxins on duty. It's now the best chance for passage such a bill has ever had, but concerns over cost and a perceived lack of support from the VA are threatening to stall progress. The key to a legislative package is language that would create a presumptive service connection to veterans suffering from a long list of diseases who were exposed to burn pits during deployments. Without such a presumption, it's often difficult for veterans to link their medical conditions to their service and prove to the VA they served near burning garbage. Under the proposed presumption policy, veterans would only need to prove they served overseas to establish a service connection for their condition.

Veterans, doctors, caregivers, VSOs, and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) all know that one contributing factor to hearing problems experienced by veterans is exposure to loud noises such as gunfire and jet blasts. It is a known fact that such noises cause hearing loss and tinnitus in veterans. Well, now there is another cause that may be attributable to hearing problems experienced by veterans. Several research studies seem to show a strong correlation between jet fuel and hearing changes suffered by thousands of veterans.

The Department of Veterans Affairs will soon start processing claims for three new presumptive illnesses linked to exposure to herbicides in Vietnam and elsewhere. It also plans to automatically review all previous claims and denials for the conditions, VA officials said Thursday. According to VA Secretary Denis McDonough, the department in coming weeks will issue a policy to implement a law that added bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinsonism -- or Parkinson's-like symptoms -- to the list of conditions considered linked to Agent Orange exposure.

The Department of Veterans Affairs will create a list of conditions thought to be linked to burn pits and other air-quality problems experienced by veterans who served in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere since the Persian Gulf War. VA Secretary Denis McDonough announced Thursday that the department will start the rulemaking

process to add chronic respiratory conditions such as asthma and sinusitis to a list of presumptive illnesses considered linked to service.

It's Official, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced June 2, 2021 that two major decisions related to presumptive conditions associated with Agent Orange and particulate matter exposures during military service in Southwest Asia. VA will begin implementing provisions of the William M. Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 (Public Law 116-283), adding three conditions to the list of those presumptively associated with exposure to herbicide agents, more commonly known as Agent Orange. Those conditions are bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and Parkinsonism. VA will apply the provisions of court orders related to *Nehmer v. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs* , which may result in an earlier date for entitlement to benefits for Veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam during the Vietnam War. Vietnam War era Veterans and their survivors who previously filed and were denied benefits for one of these three new presumptive conditions will have their cases automatically reviewed without the need to refile a claim. VA will send letters to impacted Veterans and survivors.

The number of backlogged veterans disability claims has been cut by about 10 percent in recent weeks but likely won't return to pre-pandemic levels until late 2022, Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) officials acknowledged June 10, 2021. And VA officials warned that number could grow again if Congress passes pending legislation granting new disability benefits to tens of thousands of veterans exposed to burn pits while serving overseas in the recent wars. As of this week, a little more than 191,000 disability claims were considered backlogged, meaning they have been pending for four months or more.

If you are a U.S. veteran who served during specific wartime periods or are the surviving spouse of one, you may be eligible for the little-known Wartime Pension Benefits. The pension is intended to provide a guaranteed minimum income for veterans over 65 or their survivors who qualify. A veteran or his/her survivor who is eligible for the Wartime Veterans Pension may also be qualified for the additional Aid and Attendance Supplement or the Housebound Supplement. These supplements are paid in addition to the basic pension, and provide a small additional income for persons who either need daily assistance with everyday living tasks or are substantially confined to their home.

In the past, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) was adamant it did not have to pay emergency room medical bills for veterans who sought out treatment at civilian hospitals. Now, all veterans who were forced to pay out of pocket hospital bills from non-VA emergency rooms recently received a major reprieve.



Please **Remember.....** ***That all gave some, but many gave all!***