



Agent Orange Review

www.VA.gov/AgentOrange

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Information for Veterans Who Served in Vietnam

August 2008

IOM Announces New Vietnam Veterans and Agent Orange Committee to Prepare 2008 Update

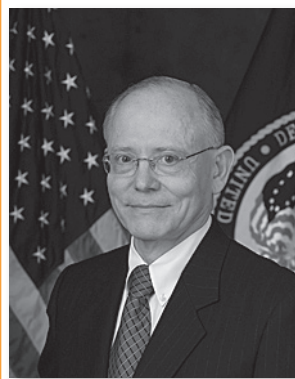
The newest Vietnam Veterans and Agent Orange Institutes of Medicine Committee (IOM) has been announced. The independent IOM Committee has already started preparing an updated review and evaluation of new available scientific and medical evidence about the possible association between exposure to dioxin and herbicides used in Vietnam and various health effects.

This newest review builds on the information developed by previous IOM committees who wrote the original Veterans and Agent Orange Report in 1994, and by those committees that wrote updates to the original report every two years (1998, 2000, 2002, 2004, and 2006).

The newest update will be completed in 2008 and will focus on scientific studies and other information developed since the release of the earlier reports. All are available on-line at www.nap.edu.

As part of this process, the IOM recently held a public meeting June 19, 2008 in San Antonio Texas for a candid discussion with veterans and their families about health effects from herbicides sprayed during the Vietnam War. The primary purpose of this meeting was to hear from Vietnam veterans about their health concerns. The report from this newest IOM committee will be provided to the Department of Veterans Affairs to help advise officials on policy decisions regarding compensation to veterans for service-related illnesses.

You can see who is serving on this committee at www.nationalacademies.org/.



Dr. James B. Peake
Secretary of Veterans Affairs

VA Secretary Appoints Panel of National Suicide Experts

Goal Is Reducing Veterans' Suicides

Dr. James B. Peake, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, has announced the names of members appointed to two special panels that will make recommendations on ways the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) can improve its programs in suicide prevention, suicide research and suicide education.

“There is nothing more tragic than the death by suicide of even one of the great men or women who have served this nation,” Peake said. “VA is committed to doing all we can to improve our understanding of a complicated issue that is also a national concern.”

The “Blue Ribbon Work Group on Suicide Prevention in the Veterans Population” will include government experts from various suicide prevention and education programs in ▶▶ *continued on page 3, 1st column, bottom*

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Agent Orange Review

About the “Review”

The **Agent Orange Review** is produced by VA’s Environmental Agents Service (EAS). The “Review” is published to provide information on Agent Orange and related matters to Vietnam veterans, their families, and others with concerns about herbicides used in Vietnam. This publication, including previous issues and other information, are available online at www.VA.gov/AgentOrange.

This issue is the 47th and was completed in June 2008. It does not include developments that occurred since that time. Downloadable audio files (“podcasts”) of news items are available at our website at www.va.gov/EnvironAgents, click on “*Veterans and Agent Orange*”.

Comments or questions about the content or design of the Review are encouraged. Suggestions and ideas for future issues should be sent to **Agent Orange Review**, Environmental Agents Service (131), Agent Orange Review, VA Central Office, 810 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20420.

Requests for additional copies of this and earlier issues should also be directed to the above address. Please specify the issue date and the quantity sought. A limited supply is available.

VA updates the Review mailing address listing annually based on IRS records. “Review” recipients who have not been filing Federal income tax returns annually and have moved to another residence are encouraged to send their old and new addresses and Social Security number to the **Agent Orange Review** Corporate Franchise Data Center, Austin Campus (200/397A), 1615 Woodward Street, Austin, TX 78772-0001.

Questions about the **Agent Orange Registry** Examination program should be directed to the Environmental Health Clinician, previously known as the Registry Health Physician, or to the Environmental Health Coordinator (formerly called the Agent Orange Registry Coordinator) at your VA medical center. Questions regarding **eligibility for health care** should be directed to the hospital administration service at the nearest VA medical center. Information on enrolling for VA health care may be obtained by calling the Health Revenue Center toll-free: **1-877-222-8387**.

VA Needs More Volunteer Drivers:

Help Wanted: Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has immediate openings for volunteer drivers to transport veterans to medical appointments. Successful candidates must pass a medical exam, have a valid driver’s license, a safe driving record, and carry current auto insurance. Full and part-time volunteer positions available at VA medical centers nationwide. Schedule: Monday through Friday. Hours: Flexible. Benefits: the satisfaction of helping the Nation’s veterans in need.

This longtime program, a collaborative effort between VA and the Disabled American Veterans (DAV) that offers transportation to veterans in need, is now trying to deal with an aging driver population. The



VA Volunteer Transportation Network (VTN) is looking for additional volunteer drivers to sustain its program of providing free rides to veterans needing transportation to their medical appointments at VA medical centers and clinics. Although there are 9,059 volunteer drivers, the program faces an aging driver population and must recruit younger volunteers to continue this service.

The program has been around since 1987, when Congress reduced funding for VA’s Beneficiary Travel program. The DAV decided to initiate a nationwide volunteer-based transportation network, in concert with VA’s Voluntary Service Office, to

provide transportation to eligible veterans. Had the DAV not taken on the mission of providing this service, many veterans probably would have forgone the medical care they are entitled to receive. The veterans who use the VTN service are typically too ill to drive themselves, do not have family members available to drive them to their appointments, or have no other means of transportation.

VA establishes policy for volunteer participation in the program. Those interested in becoming volunteer drivers must complete a VA volunteer application, and pass a physical examination and health screening administered at a VA medical center. Once determined to be physically fit to safely transport passengers, volunteers must provide proof of a safe driving record, a valid driver's license, current motor vehicle insurance, or personal insurance, and be willing to participate in all related training provided by VA.

This program has been successful thanks to the selflessness of veteran volunteers, who are willing to give some of their time to serve veterans.

Interested in becoming a volunteer driver? Contact the Voluntary Service department at your nearest VA medical center, or visit the VA Voluntary Service Web site at www.va.gov/volunteer.

(Panel of National Suicide Experts...continued from page 1)
agencies including the Department of Defense, the Centers for Disease Control, the National Institute of Health, and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

A second group working on this issue will be a nine-member expert panel, made up of nationally renowned experts from outside of the government from public health suicide programs, suicide research and clinical treatment programs. They will provide professional opinions, interpretations, and conclusions on suicide prevention programs to the Blue Ribbon Work Group. They will also make recommendations to the Work Group on opportunities for improvement in VA's programs.

Secretary Peake initially announced the formation of the work group during testimony to Congress earlier this year.

MyHealthVet: Protects Your Healthcare Information Online

MyHealthVet is a VA Web site that provides a great deal of health information for veterans and others. It is located at www.myhealth.va.gov/. The program lets veterans of any era record their personal military history in privacy and at their convenience.

The information is permanently and confidentially retained in MyHealthVet.

If they wish, a veteran can choose to share their history with their health care providers and others. This is a totally voluntary program for all veterans, and veterans are not required to participate. In particular, details of incidents that may involve exposures to occupational and military hazards, including exposure to a wide range of environmental hazards encountered during military service, can be of value to veterans and to their health care providers as part of understanding a veteran's medical problems and complaints, and to help establish rapport.

A brochure entitled "Your Story: How would you like to tell your military story," describes how to log on to "MyHealthVet," and to record information about events that took place during a veteran's military career, is available at www.va.gov/vhapublications/ViewPublication.asp?pub_ID=1368. According to VA officials responsible for maintaining the MyHealthVet Web site, the personal military history feature is one of the most popular items on the site. The program provides an online military history form that allows a veteran to easily record details including the time and location where an incident occurred, branch of service, military occupation and specialties, assignments, military or occupational exposures that may have occurred, and other relevant details.

Providing the opportunity to record a personal military history is part of VA's effort to reach out to veterans by listening. A related effort is the Military Service History pocket card, which suggests some key, basic questions that a provider may ask a veteran about their military service (available at www.VA.gov/oaa/pocketcard).

2008 Federal Benefits for Veterans Book Available Online

The 2008 edition of the Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents, one of the most popular documents published by the Federal Government, is now available online. Updated annually, this publication provides information for veterans and their dependents on a wide variety of topics and has sections titled:

- VA Healthcare,
- Service Connected Disabilities,
- Pensions,
- Home Loans,
- Life Insurance, and
- Memorial Benefits.

It can be found on VA's website at www.va.gov/opa/vadocs/current_benefits.asp Additional sections provide information for Reservists, National Guard, and other special groups. It is intended as a reference guide for all of our nation's veterans, their spouses and family members, and those who help veterans access VA benefits and services."

How to Apply for Disability Compensation from VA

(Because of the high level of interest in this subject, the following previously printed article has been updated).

Veterans with service-connected illnesses or injuries are eligible for monthly payments, called disability compensation. The disability must have been incurred or aggravated during active military service. Furthermore, the veteran's military service must have been terminated through separation or discharge under conditions that were other than dishonorable.

Disability compensation varies according to the degree of disability and the number of dependents. Benefits are not subject to Federal or state income tax. The receipt of military retirement pay, disability severance pay, and separation incentive payments known as SSB and VSI (Special Separation Benefits and Voluntary Separation Incentives) also affects the amount of VA compensation paid.

Disability Ratings Ranges:

The disability ratings range from 0 to 100 percent (in increments of 10 percent). For example, in 2008, a

veteran with a disability rating of 10 percent receives \$117; a veteran with disability rating of 50 percent gets \$728; and a veteran who is totally disabled and evaluated at 100 percent receives \$2,527 monthly.

Veterans with disability ratings between 30 and 100 percent also are eligible for monthly allowances for each child. (The amount depends on the disability rating).

A veteran who either is in need of regular aid and attendance of another person (including the veteran's spouse) or who is permanently housebound may be entitled to additional benefits. VA must make that determination before the veteran can get these benefits.

Must Apply To Be Considered

Veterans must apply separately for disability compensation. It is not provided automatically; nor does participation in a health registry substitute for filing a claim. VA veterans service representatives (VSR) can provide the necessary application and assist veterans who need help in completing it. VSRs are located at all VA Regional Offices and in most VA medical centers.

For help in locating a VSR near you, call the following toll-free telephone number:
1-800-827-1000.

New Disability Compensation Rates for 2008

| Percent Disabled | No Dependents | Veteran & Spouse |
|------------------|---------------|------------------|
| 10% | \$117 | ----- |
| 20% | \$230 | ----- |
| 30% | \$356 | \$398 |
| 40% | \$512 | \$568 |
| 50% | \$728 | \$799 |
| 60% | \$921 | \$1,006 |
| 70% | \$1,161 | \$1,260 |
| 80% | \$1,349 | \$1,462 |
| 90% | \$1,517 | \$1,644 |
| 100% | \$2,527 | \$2,669 |

Effective 12/1/2007.

www.vba.va.gov/bln/21/rates/comp01.htm#BM01

Other Benefits:

In addition to the compensation program described above, individual veterans may be eligible for the

full range of other benefits offered by VA, including education and training, vocational rehabilitation, home loan guaranties, life insurance, pension, burial benefits, and more.

To learn more about VA's programs, veterans and other interested parties can visit the VA home page www.va.gov or call 1-800-827-1000. For additional information on other benefits programs, please check online at www.vba.va.gov/VBA/benefits/factsheets/.

Health Conditions Presumptively Recognized to Date

The information contained in this article updates earlier issues of this newsletter. We are providing it again because of the high level of interest and because we know that some readers are seeing it for the first time. For more information, see www.VA.gov/AgentOrange.

The following health conditions are presumptively recognized for service connection. Vietnam veterans with one or more of these conditions do not have to show that their illness(es) is (are) related to their military service to get disability compensation. *VA presumes that their condition is service-connected.*

Conditions Recognized in Veterans:

1. Chloracne (must occur within 1 year of exposure to Agent Orange)
2. Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
3. Soft tissue sarcoma (other than osteosarcoma, chondrosarcoma, Kaposi's sarcoma, or mesothelioma)
4. Hodgkin's disease
5. Porphyria cutanea tarda (must occur within 1 year of exposure)
6. Multiple myeloma
7. Respiratory cancers, including cancers of the lung, larynx, trachea, and bronchus
8. Prostate cancer
9. Acute and subacute transient peripheral neuropathy (must appear within 1 year of exposure and resolve within 2 years of date of onset)
10. Type 2 diabetes
11. Chronic lymphocytic leukemia
12. Conditions Recognized in Children of Vietnam Veterans:
13. Spina bifida (except spina bifida occulta) (linked to herbicide exposure)

14. Certain other birth defects in the children of women Vietnam veterans (linked not to herbicide exposure but rather to service in Vietnam itself)

Brief Description of Conditions Recognized for Presumptive Service Connection for In-Country Vietnam Veterans:

Chloracne: A skin condition that occurs soon after dioxin exposure and looks like common forms of acne seen in teenagers. The first sign of chloracne may be excessive oiliness of the skin. This is accompanied or followed by numerous blackheads. In mild cases, the blackheads may be limited to the areas around the eyes extending to the temples. In more severe cases, blackheads may appear in many places, especially over the cheek bones and other facial areas, behind the ears, and along the arms.

Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma: A group of malignant tumors (cancers) that affect the lymph glands and other lymphatic tissue. These tumors are relatively rare compared to other types of cancer. Survival rates have improved during the past 2 decades. The common factor is the absence of the certain cells (known as giant Reed-Sternberg cells) that distinguish this cancer from Hodgkin's disease.

Soft tissue sarcoma: A group of different types of malignant tumors (cancers) that arise from body tissues such as muscle, fat, blood and lymph vessels, and connective tissues (not in hard tissue such as bone or cartilage). These cancers are in the soft tissue that occurs within and between organs.

Hodgkin's disease: A malignant lymphoma (cancer) characterized by progressive enlargement of the lymph nodes, liver, and spleen, and by progressive anemia.

Porphyria cutanea tarda: A disorder characterized by liver dysfunction and by thinning and blistering of the skin in sun-exposed areas.

Multiple myeloma: A cancer of specific bone marrow cells that is characterized by bone marrow tumors in various bones of the body.

Respiratory cancers: Cancers of the lung, larynx, trachea, and bronchus.

Prostate cancer: Cancer of the prostate; one of the most common cancers among men.

Peripheral neuropathy (transient acute or subacute): A nervous system condition that causes numbness, tingling, and motor weakness. This condition affects

only the peripheral nervous system, that is, only the nervous system outside the brain and spinal cord. Only the transient (short-term) acute and subacute forms of this condition, not the chronic persistent forms, have been associated with herbicide exposure.

Diabetes mellitus: Often referred to as Type 2 diabetes; it is characterized by high blood sugar levels resulting from the body's inability to respond properly to the hormone insulin.

Chronic lymphocytic leukemia: A disease that progresses slowly with increasing production of excessive numbers of white blood cells.

In Children of Vietnam Veterans:

Spina bifida (linked to herbicide exposure): A neural tube birth defect that results from the failure of the bony portion of the spine to close properly in the developing fetus during early pregnancy.

Disabilities other than spinal bifida in Children of Vietnam Veterans (linked not to herbicide exposure but rather to service in Vietnam)

Covered birth defects include a wide range conditions:

Eighteen defects are specifically included and others not specifically excluded are covered. For more information, contact a veteran services representative at 1-800-827-1000. Covered birth defects include, but are not limited to, the following conditions:

1. achondroplasia,
2. cleft lip and cleft palate,
3. congenital heart disease,
4. congenital talipes equinovarus (clubfoot),
5. esophageal and intestinal atresia,
6. Hallerman-Streiff syndrome,
7. hip dysplasia,
8. Hirschprung's disease (congenital megacolon),
9. hydrocephalus due to aqueductal stenosis,
10. hypospadias,
11. imperforate anus,
12. neural tube defects,
13. Poland syndrome,
14. pyloric stenosis,
15. sundactyly (fused digits),
16. tracheoesophageal fistula,
17. undescended testicle, and
18. Williams syndrome.

Agent Orange Registry Statistics

The Agent Orange Registry began in mid-1978 to respond to the health-related concerns of veterans returning from Vietnam and their families. The examinations are available at nearly all Department of Veterans Affairs medical facilities. (For more information on the exam, go to www.va.gov/AgentOrange.) The following are statistics about the Agent Orange Registry as of June 1, 2008:

- Initial Examinations – 454,069
- Follow-Up Examinations – 52,115
- Total Agent Orange Registry Examinations – 506,184
- Total Examinations in 2003 – 28,337
- Total Examinations in 2004 – 30,142
- Total Examinations in 2005 – 29,705
- Total Examinations in 2006 – 27,360
- Total Examinations in 2007- 22,632
- Total Examinations January 2008-April 2008- 4,563
- Total Agent Orange Registry Examination – Female – 8,791

Q's & A's

The "Review" includes a questions-and-answers feature in response to questions sent by readers. Vietnam veterans and their families and friends often have questions and concerns about health issues relating to military service in Vietnam. They want answers and knowledge about what VA and other Federal departments and agencies are doing to help these veterans. Readers often ask about VA disability policy.

Q. What is the status of Blue Water Navy veterans following the most recent court activity?

A. The Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims found that VA did not have a good reason to exclude Blue Water Navy veterans from the Agent Orange presumptions. VA disagreed with that finding and appealed to the United States Court of Appeals for the Federal District. On May 8, 2008, the United States Appeals Court ruled in VA's favor and reversed the decision of the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims.

The representatives for the veteran who appealed VA's decision have filed a motion for reconsideration in the federal circuit that is pending. Processing of Blue Water Navy cases will remain stayed until the court renders its decision.

Updates will be included in future editions of the Review.

Where to Get Help and Additional Information

Veterans with Questions about Agent Orange- Key Contacts:

- VA's toll-free Special Issues Helpline at **1-800-749-8387**
- Your nearest VA medical center, which you can locate at www.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp
- VA's toll-free number at **1-800-827-1000**.
- For general questions about Agent Orange, contact VA's toll-free **Special Issues Helpline at 1-800-749-8387**.
You also can find information on our web page at www.va.gov/AgentOrange.

If you are concerned about possible long-term consequences of your exposure and served in Vietnam, Korea along the DMZ in April 1968 through July 1969, or were exposed to Agent Orange or other herbicides elsewhere during the testing, transporting, or spraying of herbicides for military purposes, contact the nearest VA medical

center to request an Agent Orange examination. You can find the VA medical center nearest you at www.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp.

If you are a Vietnam veteran and need medical treatment for conditions that may be related to herbicides used in Vietnam: Contact the nearest VA medical center for eligibility information and possible medical treatment, or call VA's toll-free Special Issues Helpline at **1-800-749-8387**. You can find the VA medical center nearest you at www.va.gov/directory/guide/home.asp.

If you encounter difficulties at a VA medical center: Contact the "patient advocate" or "patient representative" at that facility for assistance in resolving the problem. Ask the medical center telephone operator for the patient advocate or representative.

Vietnam veterans with children with spina bifida: Contact VA's national toll-free hotline at **1-888-820-1756**, or the nearest VA regional office ▶▶ *continued on page 8*

Address Changes

If this newsletter has your old address, please use this form to update our mailing list. Send the completed form to:

Agent Orange Review

Corporate Franchise Data Center
Austin Campus (200/397A)
1615 Woodward Street
Austin, TX 78772-0001

If you have access to the Agent Orange Review via the VA Web site www.va.gov/EnvironAgents and wish to discontinue receiving a copy by mail, please complete the form provided and return it to the Austin Automation Center. If you are receiving more than one copy of the newsletter, please let us know. Write to the address above. Please provide your name, address, and last four digits of your Social Security number. You may use this or other paper. Please indicate what publication that you are receiving.

Thank you.

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| Subscription or address change form for Agent Orange Review Newsletter <i>Please print</i> | | | | | | | | | |
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(Where to Get Help and Additional Information, from page 7)

by calling toll-free **1-800-827-1000**. Additional information about spina bifida is available from the Spina Bifida Association of America at 4590 MacArthur Blvd, NW, Suite 250, Washington, DC 20007, or toll-free at **1-800-621-3141**, or by email at sbaa@sbaa.org. The web site is www.sbaa.org.

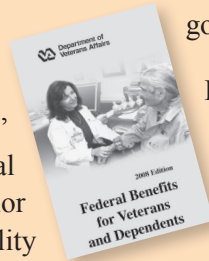
For disability information: Contact a VA veterans' services representative at the nearest VA regional office or health care facility to talk with a counselor and apply for disability compensation. VA disability counselors have information about the wide range of benefit programs that VA administers.

The national toll-free number is **1-800-827-1000**. To start a disability claim online, go to www.va.gov. You also can get information about disability compensation from VA's toll-free Special Issues Helpline at **1-800-749-8387**.

Representatives of **Veterans Service Organizations** have been of great help to many military veterans,

including Vietnam veterans who are seeking benefits they earned through their service to the Nation. (VA does not endorse or recommend any specific group over another.)

State and County Veteran Service Officers are also good resources for Vietnam and other veterans.



For additional benefits information, see VA's Federal Benefits for Veterans and Dependents booklet. This booklet is updated annually to reflect changes in law and policies and is available at www.va.gov/opa/Is1/index.asp.

It also may be purchased from the U.S. Government Printing Office either at their website <http://bookstore.gpo.gov/> or by mail: U.S. Government Printing Office, Superintendent of Documents, Washington, DC 20402.

VA's World Wide Web pages are updated throughout the year to present the most current information. The VA home page www.va.gov contains links to selections on compensation and pension benefits, health care benefits and services, burial and memorial benefits, etc.

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