



February 1, 2023

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You May Qualify for Disability Benefits

During a recent VA health care appointment, you reported that you may have experienced one or more exposures to herbicides, radiation, and/or toxins during your time in service. Based on your exposure, you may be eligible for disability benefits due to a recent legislative change.

What is Happening

On August 10, 2022, President Biden signed the Sergeant First Class (SFC) Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022, also known as the PACT Act, into law. This legislation brought about the following changes:

- Expands the list of locations, timeframes, and presumptive conditions related to herbicide exposures.
- Removes the manifestation period and its compensable level requirement for certain disabilities occurring in Persian Gulf War Veterans.
- Expands locations for Persian Gulf War Veterans.
- Expands the list of presumptive conditions and timeframes for certain diseases associated with burn pits and toxic exposures.
- Expands the list of risk activities for radiation exposures.

If you have already filed a disability compensation claim based on the PACT Act, please disregard this letter.

How This May Affect Veterans Exposed to Herbicides

If you were previously denied disability compensation benefits, you may now be eligible and are encouraged to apply if you performed covered service in the following locations during the specified timeframes:

- Thailand at any United States or Royal Thai base during the period beginning January 9, 1962, and ending June 30, 1976, regardless of where on the base you were located or what military job specialty you performed.
- Laos during the period beginning December 1, 1965, and ending September 30, 1969.
- Cambodia at Mimot or Krek, Kampong Cham Province, during the period beginning April 16, 1969, and ending April 30, 1969.
- Guam or American Samoa, or in the territorial waters thereof, during the period beginning January 9, 1962, and ending July 31, 1980.

- Johnston Atoll, or on a ship that called at Johnston Atoll, during the period beginning January 1, 1972, and ending September 30, 1977.

Additionally, two new presumptive conditions associated with herbicide exposure have been added:

- Monoclonal gammopathy of undetermined significance (MGUS)
- Hypertension (also known as high blood pressure)

How This May Affect Persian Gulf War Veterans

If you were previously denied disability compensation benefits, you may now be eligible and are encouraged to apply if you are a Persian Gulf War Veteran and you have an undiagnosed illness or medically unexplained chronic multi-symptom illness (MUCMI). A Persian Gulf Veteran now includes service in Afghanistan, Israel, Egypt, Turkey, Syria, and Jordan, along with those who served in the Southwest Asia theater of operations which includes Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the neutral zone between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, the Gulf of Aden, the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, the Red Sea, and the airspace above these locations.

How This May Affect Gulf War Era and Post-9/11 Veterans

You may be eligible for disability compensation benefits and are encouraged to apply if you are a covered Veteran as noted below and you have one of the conditions which are now presumptively associated with exposure to burn pits and other toxins, even if there is no record of evidence of such disease during the period of service.

| A "covered Veteran" means a Veteran who performed active military, naval, air or space service while assigned to a duty station in the below locations and timeframes. | |
|---|-----------------------|
| In, or in the air space above... | On or after... |
| Bahrain Iraq Kuwait Oman Qatar Saudi Arabia Somalia, or United Arab Emirates | August 2, 1990 |
| Afghanistan Djibouti Egypt Jordan Lebanon Syria Yemen Uzbekistan | September 11, 2001 |

The following conditions are now presumptively associated with exposure to burn pits and other toxins for covered Veterans:

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|---|--|
| brain cancer | chronic bronchitis |
| gastrointestinal cancer of any type | chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) |
| glioblastoma | chronic rhinitis |
| head cancer of any type | chronic sinusitis |
| kidney cancer | constrictive bronchiolitis or obliterative bronchiolitis |
| lymphoma cancer of any type | emphysema |
| melanoma | granulomatous disease |
| neck cancer of any type | interstitial lung disease |
| pancreatic cancer | pleuritis |
| reproductive cancer of any type | pulmonary fibrosis |
| respiratory cancer of any type | sarcoidosis |
| asthma that was diagnosed after service | |

How This May Affect Veterans that Participated in a Radiation-Risk Activity

If you were previously denied disability compensation benefits, you may now be eligible for and are encouraged to apply if you participated in one of the following radiation-risk activities:

- participated in the cleanup of Enewetak Atoll during the period beginning January 1, 1977, and ending December 31, 1980.
- participated onsite in the nuclear response effort following the collision of a United States Air Force B-52 bomber and refueling plane that caused the release of four thermonuclear weapons in the vicinity of Palomares, Spain, during the period beginning January 17, 1966, and ending March 31, 1967.
- participated onsite in the nuclear response effort following the on-board fire and crash of a United States Air Force B-52 bomber that caused the release of four thermonuclear weapons in the vicinity of Thule Air Force Base, Greenland, during the period beginning January 21, 1968, and ending September 25, 1968.

What We Need from You

- If you **have not** previously submitted a disability compensation claim for your exposure-related disability and would like to do so, please submit **VA Form 21-526EZ, Application for Disability Compensation and Related Compensation Benefits**.
- If you **have** previously submitted a claim for disability compensation for your exposure-related disability but were not found eligible, please submit **VA Form 20-0995, Decision Review Request: Supplemental Claim**.
- If you wish, you may submit additional evidence, such as medical records or a biopsy report, with your application. Also, VA can assist you in gathering new and relevant evidence to support your claim.

- For more information on herbicide exposure, please see VA's page on herbicide exposure at www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/agentorange. For more information on Gulf War exposures, please see VA's page on Gulf War Veterans' illnesses at <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/gulfwar>. For more information on radiation, please see VA's page on ionizing radiation exposure at <https://www.va.gov/disability/eligibility/hazardous-materials-exposure/ionizing-radiation>.
- You may have your provider complete a Disability Benefits Questionnaire (DBQ) based on your current condition. For more information and for access to the DBQs, see https://www.benefits.va.gov/compensation/dbq_publicdbqs.asp.

Where to Send Your Correspondence

Documents may be submitted by mail, in person at a VA regional office or electronically. However, VA recommends submitting correspondence electronically as this is the fastest method of receipt.

VA provides several tools to assist in electronic submission. To learn more about how to submit documents and claims electronically, visit www.va.gov/disability/upload-supporting-evidence. You can also go directly to <https://eauth.va.gov/accessva/?cspSelectFor=quicks submit> to digitally upload any correspondence using QuickSubmit.

By visiting www.va.gov you can also check your claim status and learn about other VA benefits.

If you prefer to mail your correspondence, please use the mailing address below:

| Compensation Benefits |
|--|
| Department of Veterans Affairs Compensation Intake Center P.O. Box 4444 Janesville, WI 53547 Toll Free Fax: (844) 531-7818 |

This address serves **all United States and foreign locations**.

Fraud Prevention and Reporting Resources

- Be cautious of companies claiming to be contacting you on behalf of the VA. Contact VA directly at 1-800-827-1000 if you are unsure about the authenticity of a message you've received.
- No individual or organization may charge you a fee for filing an initial VA claim. Only VA-accredited agents and attorneys may charge a fee to assist you with additional claims or appeals once VA has made a decision on your initial claim.
- Use the Office of General Counsel Accreditation tool to confirm and validate accredited representatives at a Veteran Service Organization, agent, or attorney credentials at www.va.gov/ogc/apps/accreditation/index.asp.
- To report suspected fraudulent activity, please contact VA's Office of Inspector General at <https://www.va.gov/oig/hotline>.

If You Have Questions or Need Assistance

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| Find a Local, Accredited Representative | https://www.benefits.va.gov/vso Note: Veterans Service Organizations can help you with a claim for benefits, free of charge. |
| VA Website: PACT Act | www.va.gov/resources/the-pact-act-and-your-va-benefits |
| VA Forms Website | www.va.gov/find-forms |
| Frequently Asked Questions | www.va.gov/resources |
| Submit a Question: <i>Include your full name and VA file number</i> | https://ask.va.gov |
| Toll Free Number | 1-800-827-1000 Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. ET |
| TTY, Federal Relay | 711 |
| VA Regional Office Location | www.va.gov/find-locations |

Veterans Crisis Line Dial 988 then Press 1

You can also send a text message to 838255 to receive confidential support 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.

For more information, visit www.veteranscrisisline.net

Thank you for your service to our country.

Sincerely,

Beth Murphy
Executive Director, Compensation Service
Veterans Benefits Administration