

## Were you exposed to burn pits while deployed?

Written by By Carolie Watkins Guest Opinion Columnist  
Friday, 18 March 2016 08:04

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Veterans serving in Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn, Djibouti, Africa, Operations Desert Shield or Desert Storm or the Southeast Asia Theater of operations after August, 1990 may have been exposed to burn pits and other airborne hazards?

Veterans serving during this period have started to report respiratory symptoms and health conditions that may be related to exposure to burn pits. The long-term health effects of exposure to burn pits and other airborne hazards are not fully understood. In an effort to better understand these health effects, VA has launched the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry for Veterans and Service members.

“While nearly 61,000 Veterans and Service members have joined the Burn Pit Registry since its launch nearly two years ago. VA encourages any Veterans serving during this period to sign up for register.

The Registry gives participants an opportunity to document any concerns they may have about deployment-related exposures and provides an opportunity to obtain a free health evaluation by a VA or DOD provider. The evaluation can identify and document any problems potentially related to the exposures and ensure ongoing follow up for any existing health conditions or any additional conditions that could emerge down the road.

One challenge when addressing environmental exposures is that we don't always know what the long-term health effects of those exposures may be or when those health concerns might arise. Some exposures don't lead to any long-term problems. Others, however, may have long-term or downstream health effects that aren't identifiable early on. Through the registry, if health conditions related to exposures do emerge months or years later, we will be able to identify them more quickly and to make sure that Veterans get the health care that they need in a timely manner.

A common misunderstanding about the registry is that participation is required to obtain disability compensation benefits. This is not true. The burn pit registry and all other VA registries are unrelated to the disability compensation rating process. While a Registry note in your medical record summarizing your exposure concerns and related medical treatment may serve as evidence to support a claim, it is not a necessary document or step in the claims process.

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The registry is open to anyone who served in:

Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom/Operation New Dawn

Djibouti, Africa on or after Sept. 11, 2001

Operations Desert Shield or Desert Storm

Southeast Asia theater of operations on or after Aug. 2, 1990

See more at: <http://www.va.gov/HEALTH/NewsFeatures/2016/March/Were-you-exposed-to-burn-pits-while-deployed.asp#sthash.0ty7JZ0K.dpuf>

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