

Toxic Exposures among Veterans Who Served After 9/11

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You may have heard about Agent Orange and the damage it has caused to the health of Vietnam veterans and their offspring, and chances are you may have also heard about the health implications the open-air burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan have for our Post-911 veterans.

However, most are not aware of the varied and multiple exposures to toxins that occur during the course of one's military service. Some of these exposures are recognized by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), however many are not. The purpose of this article is to inform you, the Post-911 veteran, of your possible toxic exposures, so that you may have a conversation with your doctors, family members, and fellow service members.

The following list, while not comprehensive, provides a starting point for discussions: Open-air burn pits; depleted uranium and radiation exposures; infectious diseases, such as *Leishmaniasis*; toxic chemicals, including aircraft fuel, perflouride compounds, and phthalates; local mineral dust and particulate matter; noise and vibrations, vaccines and other medications; and various occupational materials. Please refer to www.veteranshealth.net, the website of Vietnam Veterans of America's Veterans Health Council, which lists the toxic exposures of our military service, as well as other pertinent health information.

What are the steps to take if you feel you may have been subject to toxic exposures during your military service? Sign up for the voluntary environmental health registry through the VA. You can do so at <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/benefits/registry-evaluation.asp>. The VA maintains multiple registries, and we encourage you to sign up for all for which you qualify. The registry evaluation is separate from VA's disability compensation process and does not confirm exposure during service. We encourage you to speak with a certified veteran service officer about filing a claim for service connection for your toxic exposure(s).

While you may not have symptoms now, you may have them later in life. And whether you are receiving your healthcare through the VA or elsewhere, we encourage you to speak with your doctors about these exposures, so they may determine what to keep a focus on or to test for.

The Veterans Health Council is a program of Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) whose mission is improving veterans' health through information and education. With our partners from the Wounded Warrior Project and the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS), we have come together in part to ensure that our Post-9/11 veterans and their families don't have to wait a lifetime for the government to make good on its promise to care for those injured in defense of our Constitution. No longer can we accept "delay, deny until they die." Rather, we must work collaboratively to address

the effects of toxic exposures during our military service. Now is the time for those who served after 9/11 to begin to educate and advocate for research on their toxic exposures.

